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## RECOMMENDATION.

THESE volumes of "*Plain Sermons*" appear to me to be admirably adapted to the conveying of religious instruction on the sound principles of the gospel, and are therefore recommended to the members of my diocese, for private and family reading. I also hereby authorize the public reading of them, together with such others as I may from time to time appoint, by lay-readers within said diocese.

BENJAMIN T. ONDERDONK,

*Bishop of the Diocese of New York.*

NEW YORK, *June, 14th, 1841.*



# PLAIN SERMONS,

BY

CONTRIBUTORS

TO THE

“TRACTS FOR THE TIMES.”

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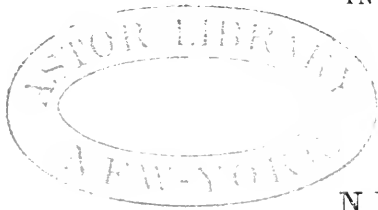
“We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

“For we are glad when we are weak and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.”—2 Cor. xiii. 8, 9.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



NEW YORK:

J. & H. G. LANGLEY, 57 CHATHAM STREET.

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1841.



## ADVERTISEMENT.

THE principles which it has been the object of "Tracts for the Times" to uphold, have obtained more extensive reception than their first advocates could have ventured to anticipate; and the opposition they have met with has been in proportion. But as the former circumstance can *of itself* afford very little substantial ground for satisfaction, so the latter need not necessarily excite feeling of uneasiness.

Nevertheless, while our persuasion of the inherent truth of these principles may justly authorize us to be thus indifferent to transient blame or praise, the very same thought cannot but make us anxious, lest any, who do admit the truth of them in theory, should be at no pains to realize them in their daily practice; an anxiety which must naturally be felt by every one who entertains any deep sense of the value of such principles, and has observed the extent to which they are being received.

For if these principles, developed and imbodyed, do in fact constitute that very church system, which is the channel, as we suppose, of our highest privileges and blessings, it necessarily follows that any want of seriousness in the reception of them must be regarded as equivalent to a careless treatment of things sacred, and as such attended with proportionate danger. That sub-

jects of high and awful character cannot be lightly approached with impunity, is a truth we learn not only from reason and experience, but also from the whole tone and tenor of God's holy Word.

If therefore, as time goes on, there shall be found persons, who, admiring the innate beauty and majesty of the fuller system of primitive Christianity, and seeing the transcendent strength of its principles, shall become loud and voluble advocates in their behalf, speaking the more freely because they do not feel them deeply as founded in divine and eternal truth: of such persons it is our duty to declare plainly, that as we should contemplate their condition with much serious misgiving, so would they be the last persons from whom we should seek support.

But if, on the other hand, there shall be any, who, in the silent humility of their lives, and in their unaffected reverence for holy things, show that they in truth accept these principles as real and substantial, and by habitual purity of heart and serenity of temper, give proof of their deep veneration for sacraments and sacramental ordinances, these persons, whether our professed adherents or not, best exemplify the kind of characters which the writers for the "Tracts for the Times" have wished to form.

To carry out this design more fully, it has been thought well to publish, from time to time, in connexion with the "Tracts," a few "Plain Sermons," in order to show that the subjects treated of in the "Tracts" were not set forth as mere parts of ideal systems, or as themes for disputation, matters only of sentiment, or party, or idle speculation, but are rather urged as truths of immediate and essential importance, bearing more or less directly on our every-day behavior, means

ADVERTISEMENT.

of continual resource and consolation in life, and of calm and sure hope in death.

It is also intended, by thus publishing practical sermons in connexion with treatises too generally considered as only controversial, to bring before all persons, whether friendly to us or opposed, that solemn admonition from our blessed Lord himself, "If any one *will* do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God," an admonition which, amid so much unhappy contention and dispute, we might, many of us, be too apt to forget.

In conclusion, we have only to observe, that if in these "Sermons," or in the "Tracts for the Times" themselves, there should appear occasional discrepancies, it must be remembered that when many persons contemplate one object, especially one so vast and comprehensive, there must be shades of difference in the light in which they separately view it. And if (which is a consideration of far greater importance) anything should be found in them which appears inconsistent with the analogy of the faith, or in any other respect not tending to edification, we can only entreat all sincere Christians, who shall cast an eye on these publications, to gather from them what *good* they may contain; and, for the rest, to bear in mind, that if there should be anything erroneous, or unavoidably scandalous (which we humbly hope there is not), their duty is to make allowances for human infirmity, and to join with us in beseeching Almighty God to bless every endeavor, however feeble, in behalf of his afflicted church.

OXFORD,

*The Feast of the Circumcision, 1839.*

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# SERMON I.

## CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY.

LENT.

JEREMIAH xiii. 20.

“Where is the flock that was given thee ——  
Thy beautiful flock?”

THE holy season of Lent, as it was intended from the first to give occasion and encouragement to all persons who had any spark of seriousness still alive in their hearts, to cherish generally thoughts of their real condition, of their need of deeper repentance and more energetic faith, so may it with reason also suggest to all reflecting minds particular recollections of the solemn responsibilities pressing on them, and of the degree (greater or less) in which we have neglected them, alas! must I not say, even the best of us.

To the authorized minister of Christ's church in this country, at this time, when looking back on the irremediable past, and forward on the dim future, the thought must naturally arise—How much have we to answer for, and what answer shall we make? How did we promise at our ordination, that we would never cease our labor, our care and diligence to bring all such as should be committed to our charge to that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among us for error in religion, or for viciousness of life! And then, whatever our labor, care, and diligence, may have been—too scanty, alas! and too mean at the most and best—how humiliating is the view of the Christian church among us at this moment,

how distracted with error in religion, how stained with viciousness of life! Again, how did we pledge ourselves to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his chosen that are in the midst of this evil world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever! And after all these pledges and promises, "Where is the flock that was given us, the beautiful flock?"

These, I say, are painful humiliating thoughts; yet salutary and even necessary to be cherished, if we would not delude ourselves with false confidences, and "see visions of peace for Jerusalem, when there is no peace, saith the Lord God."

But what I would now especially call your attention to, let all seriously-minded Christians consider how great our responsibility is—the responsibility of us all, with respect to children and young persons, that they be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord Jesus Christ—taught as well by the example as the precept of their elders, to know the God of their fathers, and to serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind, that so they may walk worthy of their heavenly vocation, and adorn the doctrine of God their Savior in all things.

It is matter for fearful reflection, to call to mind the case of parents and elder persons, too frequently, alas! to be met with in this Christian land, who, as they live on themselves from day to day, "Having no hope, and without God in the world," so they are content to see their children and other young persons around them pursuing the same ruinous and fatal course. The case is nothing rare, as all persons well know, for parents to set their children very evil examples—swearing, drunkenness, falsehood, and every kind and degree of profligacy and irreligion; these things are no matters of strange occurrence, nor limited to the thoughtlessness of youth, as people sometimes talk, but are openly practised, and even avowed by those of elder years, and even to old age and the bed of death.

Now, to set aside other considerations, how tremen-



dous must be the account which parents and other elder persons must render on the last judgment-day, for thus taking part with satan, as one may say, against Almighty God, to bring their own children to everlasting torment!

Every one knows that example is more forcible than precept, and especially evil example than good precept. When grown-up persons then, whether parents or others, use themselves to violent and intemperate language, swearing, for example, or indecent expressions, or slander, it is as if they took pains to instruct children in the language of lost spirits; it is, I say, to all intents and purposes, taking pains to teach children to blaspheme their Father and Redeemer, to pollute their tongues, formed especially for his glories, with what most of all dishonors and provokes him—to curse others or themselves, with those youthful lips which might so easily have been taught the language of prayer, gratitude, and divine charity.

Or, to glance at another case not less common, nor perhaps in the sight of God less cruel and unfeeling, though in man's opinion less gross and startling; many parents there are and elderly persons, who, while they preserve a decent exterior of conduct, yet leave their children, or other young persons for whom they are in any manner responsible, to shift for themselves; I mean in religious matters, take no personal care or trouble to give them an education substantially Christian.

Thus one sometimes hears persons called "religious," expressing themselves to this effect—that they entertain such and such opinions themselves, but do not pretend to bias their children in such matters, but leave them to form their own judgments as they grow up.

The evil consequences of this miserable, unfeeling mode of proceeding are evident in all ranks of society. Among persons of higher station it often produces a skeptical, unsettled state of mind, often amounting to practical infidelity. And in other cases we see its effects exemplified in the disunion of families on that, the point of all others where union and harmony are

sought and cherished ; and then the father perhaps goes to one place of worship, and the mother to another ; one child to one sunday-school, and one to another, and perhaps one still to another.

All this is considered of no consequence, a mere matter of indifference, and to represent it otherwise is accounted bigotry.

But I ask, is there not one rule for all ? Is not that which is true and good for the parent, true and good for the child ? Must not fathers and mothers be answerable for the bringing up of their little flock, the children whom God has given them, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ? And can this be true Christian nurture and admonition, to habituate them to those unfixed and (strictly speaking) unprincipled notions and ways in the great matter of divine worship, and communion with Christ's church here militant, but in heaven triumphant ? If these things are mere matter of fancy and opinion, invented for men's amusement or recreation, then something might be said for the customs now alluded to ; but if there be any reality at all in church communion—if it be not, as I said, a mere name and fancy, then they are no slight matters, but symptoms of extreme levity and want of serious reflection.

Far greater is the Christian wisdom and compassion of those, whether parents or others, who consider themselves distinctly responsible for the spiritual and eternal welfare of the children and young persons over whom they have influence. I mean, who consider that the inquiry will be made of them by the great Judge and Father of all : "Where is the flock that was given thee ?" Didst thou by precept much, and example more, endeavor to lead on those whom I entrusted to thee in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth ?

This responsibility lies on us all—all grown-up persons—all have an influence either for good or evil on the younger ; and happy, I say, will they be, who shall be found to have exerted this influence to the honor of our Almighty Lord and Master, and the edification

of that flock which he purchased with his own blood. Such persons, if it has pleased God that they should be parents, have made it a principal matter of their thoughts and cares that their children should be also God's children. They brought them in their earliest infancy to the baptismal font, they selected for them sponsors, who, in case of their own decease or negligence, might be to them really, and not in name only, fathers and mothers in God; they taught them, as soon as they could speak, the language of prayer and praise: in short, they labored that their dwelling-house should be, as it were, a little church, a consecrated habitation where God should be daily honored, and the wicked world shut out.

Or, to take the case of other sincere Christians whom God has not made parents or heads of families, or possibly has deprived them of their children by death or separation, they too call to mind that the lambs of Christ's flock are in a manner committed to them, not merely generally, but particularly, because on them especially lies the responsibility of being godfathers and godmothers to the children of friends and relations;—and this office they undertake readily and cheerfully for the great Shepherd's sake, and to fulfil one of the purest acts of Christian charity: and as they promised at first, so afterward they bear in mind, that it is their part and duty to see that the children, for whom they answered at the holy font, shall be instructed, as soon as they are able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession they then and there made; and chiefly they provide that they shall be well-grounded in that admirable summary of Christian principles called the church catechism, and so conducting them to the bishop to receive his apostolical blessing in confirmation, and thence to the communion feast of our Redeemer's body and blood, they feel that, as far as human frailty will permit, they have discharged the duties of a Christian sponsor.

If these things were more attended to by parents and friends, and a holy example in unison with good instruc-

tion set before young persons by their parents and other their elders, the Christian world would not be in the state in which we now see it, the Lord's flock would not be as it now is, "carried away captive."

Let then all grown-up Christians, especially parents, guardians, and other friends of children and young persons, put it seriously to their hearts and conscience, what a heavy responsibility lies on us in this respect, how the lambs of the Lord's flock are, as it were, committed to our care and charge.

Can you imagine, for example, that it is sufficient to send children to school, even the best of schools, unless you set them an example of consistent piety at home? Can you think it right to take no personal pains in the great work of Christian education, directly or indirectly? And can you suppose it possible, that you will not be called to account for thus neglecting the Lord's flock given into your care and charge; and whose eternal interests, for anything you can tell, depend on the advice you impress on them, and the example you set them?

These things, I repeat, are serious considerations, highly deserving the regard of all faithful Christians.

And this the more, because we are not sufficiently aware of our responsibility herein. I mean, that every grown-up person in any parish or place is *to a certain degree* answerable for the right instruction of every child; at least so far as this, that every one has it in his power to set a good example. But as to grown-up and elderly people, whose lives belie their professions, to them may be applied most emphatically the awful words of our Lord: "It is impossible but that offences will come, but wo to him through whom they come. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend (that is, mislead by false doctrine or evil example) one of these little ones."

In no words is it possible more forcibly to express the awfulness of our responsibility, the responsibility of each generation in behalf of that which succeeds it, of grown-up persons in behalf of the younger. Especially, there

is here set before the world, by the omniscient Judge himself, the wickedness and cruelty of misleading children by bad example, or even neglect.

May he, the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, pardon our past sinfulness in these respects, and by the aid of his blessed Spirit, so lead us for the time to come into the paths of righteousness and true holiness, that we may not have the blood of the souls of the poor innocents on our hands; but rather seek more earnestly and consistently than we have ever yet done, to preserve in Christ's fold those lambs which are yet within its holy pale, and by all gentle and compassionate ways to bring back those which are gone astray.

## SERMON II.

## THE CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT.

2 COR. v. 10.

“We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

It seems, at first sight, strange and unaccountable that Christians should go on from day to day, or at least from Sunday to Sunday, reading and hearing the word of God, and many attending to it too, and yet that all the while they should make little or no progress in holiness: for years and years remaining much in the same state, neither becoming much better, nor much worse. Whatever may be the cause of this, we may be certain that it is a very dangerous mistake:—and the more dangerous, because we are too apt to be unconcerned about it, and even to think we do very well if we do not grow worse.

It was an old heathen maxim, that “he who does not go forward, *must* go backward.” And how much more important is it, in regard of our conduct as Christians! For there is surely no ground to be met with in all the Bible and Testament for supposing that, when we have arrived at a certain point, we may stand still, and say, “We are good enough”—“if we remain as we are now, we are safe.” On the contrary, we are taught over and over again, that it is necessary we should “grow in grace,” and “in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” and “press *forward* toward the prize of our high calling,” and that “as we know how we ought to live so as to please God, we should *abound more and more*,” that “we should not be *weary* in well-doing,” but should

“take good heed lest we lose those things which we may have already wrought or gained, and miss of receiving a full reward.”

That many souls are eternally ruined by this kind of error who can doubt, that considers what Christians require, and how most people live and die? And perhaps among many causes which may tend to produce so dreadful an effect, this is one—that we are so apt to hear, and read, and even meditate on God’s word, without applying it to ourselves. Or, at least, if we do embrace any part as our own, and really treasure it up in our hearts, it is rather the promises, the blessings, the rewards, and the comforts of religion, than its strict commands and painful warnings. Not, however, but that we apply these too, readily enough—but then it is not to ourselves that we apply them, but to others. We consider not whether *we* are concerned in them or not. Indeed we take it for granted we are not. But we acknowledge at once their power and piercing sharpness, as directed against other people.

Thus when we hear the solemn warnings and the bitter rebukes contained in the Psalms, the Prophets, and the other scriptures of the Old Testament, these we apply chiefly, if not entirely, to the Jews; rather pleased to flatter ourselves with the notion (be it true or false) that we have never treated God so ungratefully as they did.

So we get rid of the Old Testament, and as to the New, we hear and read even the warnings of our Lord Jesus and his apostles, without being much, if at all, moved by them; because we do not take them to ourselves, though we may be quick enough at applying them to our neighbors. We are more fond of looking at other men’s sins than at our own, and, therefore, we think that the threatenings and reproofs of the gospel are meant for them, not for ourselves. And so like the Pharisees of old, we “make the word of God of none effect;” every body applying it to others, and no man taking it to himself. In some matters this self-deceit may pass off more easily, but in the matter of the last

judgment it can have no place. Here we can none of us pretend to escape. Here we are all concerned, one as much as the other. "*All* must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ," and among them *we* also must each of us appear there. This, at least, we cannot put off upon other people, as a truth which ought to make them tremble while we have no reason to be afraid. The apostle does not say, "Every one of *you* shall give an account of himself to God," nor again does he say, "*You* must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." He looked on it as a matter wherein himself was concerned as much as any of them. He could not but anxiously wait for that day himself, and therefore he labored to fill others with the like anxiety. "Knowing" so well "the terrors of the Lord, he persuaded men," with all affectionate earnestness, to lay them up in their hearts. Whereas we are too apt to go on, as if we alone were free from that, which every body else was subject to. As if all the world should be judged, and we should escape. As if other people's souls were all we had to care about, and our own were in no danger. It were far better that (as the saying is) "Each should take care of one," and that one should be himself. It will be well if each shall have his own single account ready against that day.

Again, we may observe that Almighty God does not say "*we shall*," but "*we must* all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." Now this deserves to be seriously considered by all who have any value for their souls, because the Bible and our own experience will both assure us, that many men flatter themselves that somehow or other (they know not how) they shall escape without being called to account.

Thus we read of men in old times who "said in their hearts, God hath forgotten—he hideth his face—he will never see it." And at another time they would say, "Jehovah shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it."—"They considered not in their hearts that God remembered all their wickedness, and that all their doings were before his face." In the apostles' times



there were persons who thought they might mock God and be never the worse for it; that they might sow to the flesh without reaping corruption—that they might reap life everlasting without sowing to the Spirit. And even in the day of judgment itself, we are taught that there will be many who will endeavor, though in vain, to flee from the face of their offended Judge, who will even yet cling to their old false hope of escaping from punishment. “They shall hide themselves (says the apostolical prophet) in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and they shall say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.”

And to this testimony of God’s word, may be added that of our own experience. For, do we not see people every day allowing themselves in the commission of errors, and in the neglect of duties—in conduct which they all the while know to be wrong, just as if it would be passed over and forgotten, and they should never hear of it again? Do we not see others acting thus continually, and are we not too ready to fall into it ourselves? Do we not too easily forget how positive, and certain, and unavoidable it is, not a matter of choice, or of doubt, that we shall appear before the judgment-seat of Christ?

If it were a matter of choice whether we should be judged or not; whether we would be tried according to the terms of the gospel-covenant, or be utterly destroyed, and perish for ever, like the beasts; it is not to be doubted, that very many persons, perhaps most, would choose the last. They would willingly enough part with the future rewards of religion, if they might but enjoy without fear or restraint the present pleasures of sin. If they could get rid of hell, they would not mind the loss of heaven.

But, however, be it good or evil, it matters not whatever we might wish, it is not now in our power to choose, we *must* appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; we *must* give an account of our own works.

If again it were any matter of doubt whether we should be judged or not, it must be allowed that our case would be materially different. For we naturally are much less careful about matters for which we think we may never be called to account. Although certainly a wise and prudent person would strive to do whatever he did well, even if there were the least chance of its being hereafter inquired into. But, however, this is not our case: we know for a certainty that all we do, will be inquired into; we *must* appear before the judgment-seat. It is necessary, it is unavoidable, no cunning will conceal us from the eye of our Judge, no strength will deliver us out of his hand. Before him must we all appear, saith the apostle—*all*—that is, none will be excused on any consideration whatever. Be we young or old, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, good or bad, we cannot escape appearing at the judgment-seat of Christ.

Remember this, then, you that are children, and see that you live always in the love and fear of Almighty God your heavenly Father. For though you are young, yet be sure his eye is ever fixed on you by day and by night; that he sees all you do, and hears all you say; that “a book of remembrance is written before him” for all your bad actions and bad words; and that in the last great day you will be judged out of the things which are written in this book.

Remember this too, you, that in consideration of your riper years, ought to have arrived also at riper judgment. You, who divide your time between the cares and comforts of this life, and neglect your principal business; who love the world better than you love God, and make religion a second-rate concern. Yet think, that though you can find little leisure for it now, yet the day will come when, whether you will or no, you must find time to give account for your own works.

Let the old too, whose night is fast drawing on, whose strength is but labor and sorrow, and even that soon to pass away; yet, let them remember, that their old age will not excuse them, but they must appear be-

fore their Judge. Let them think that they must give account, not only for the days of youth and health and strength, but for the latter days of sickness and feebleness. For indeed, to spend old age as we ought is a hard task, much harder than is generally supposed; it is a task that we have great need to be learning all our lives. But, however we spend it, we must give account for it, and as the account is, so will be the everlasting sentence.

Again, let those who are in any degree blest with "this world's good" ever remember (as they love their own souls) that they are not the owners, but the stewards of it; that hereafter they will have a strict reckoning to make for the manner in which they have employed their money, or their property, *be it ever so little*; that in that day of wrath, riches will be of no profit to us, that unless we take all possible pains to spend what we have (be it little or much) to the honor of our Savior, and the comfort of his and our brethren, and not to our own honor and comfort, they will bring on us the curse of the unprofitable servant; we shall be cast into utter darkness.

On the other hand, let not those whose lot it is to lead a life of poverty and distress, flatter themselves that in consideration of this, they shall escape the judgment of God, that the want of worldly comforts will be taken as an excuse for want of holiness. The truth is, that both the rich man ought to be the better for his riches, and the poor man the better for his poverty, whereas both riches and poverty are generally made an excuse for sin. But the excuse is a vain one; for it matters not at all what our condition is in this short life. Be we rich or poor, happy or miserable, we must all alike give an account of ourselves to God.

Nor again shall we be allowed to pass into heaven, without examination, be we ever so wise and learned. For it is, "not he that commendeth *himself* who is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." The more knowledge we have, the more danger we are in of being puffed up with self-conceit; whereas the understanding

of all mysteries and all knowledge is nothing without charity or the love of God, which alone really edifies and builds us up as living temples of the Holy Ghost. "If ye know these things (said our Lord Jesus) happy are ye." But how happy? not simply because we know them, for we might know them, and yet be very wicked and very miserable all the while; then only happy "if we do them." Nor on the other side let us trust to that too common, though most false notion, that want of knowledge will be accounted before God as an excuse for want of religion and holiness. All must come forth to a strict and just judgment: the unlearned as well as the learned—they who have had less advantages of education, as they who have had the highest. For after all, in all important points, in this country at least, there is little difference in the knowledge of the most learned and the most ignorant. Who is there that does not, or might not easily know, that he must be partaker of eternal happiness or eternal misery according as he spends his life now? that in a short time he must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to give an account of his own works, and that however people in general may spend *their* lives, it concerns *him* to take care for his own soul above all things, without much regarding his present condition? All this the most unlearned (though he may disregard it) yet must know very well, and the most learned cannot know much more. Therefore let no one suppose that little will be required of him, because he knows little. For indeed, if he would but be careful to live up to his knowledge, he would find that he had a great deal to answer for.

The consideration, too, of the judgment to come, may well make even the best of men tremble. For although they may have given up their lives to the honor and service of their master, and "labored to have a conscience void of offence toward him and toward all men," to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called," and "to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things," yet this will not save them from the

dreadful hour of making their account with God. In that hour indeed it will be an inexpressible comfort that they have that same Jesus for their judge, whom on earth they have labored to love and serve, and obey beyond all others. Still, the holiest life will not excuse us from coming forth and standing before the throne of our Savior Christ; and giving an account of our own works before men and angels.

But "if the righteous scarcely be saved," if even they must stand up and be judged as criminals before that dreadful tribunal, where and how "shall the ungodly and the sinner appear!" For they too must appear, however unwilling they may be. They must appear to give account of their thoughtless, unholy lives of the time they have wasted, the talents they have abused, the sins they have indulged in, the duties they have neglected, the warnings they have despised, the offers of mercy they have slighted, the contempt they have brought by their pride, their malice, their worldly-mindedness, on the sacred name of our Lord Jesus Christ, his word and sacraments.

Thus certain is it, my Christian brethren, that "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." The confidence of strength and manhood will avail us nothing in that day, the feebleness of childhood or old age will not be accepted as an excuse. Money will then be of no use, for the Judge will take no bribes. Poverty and distress will be no plea in our favor, for that will be a time of justice, not of mercy. Wisdom and learning will show us no way of escaping the terrors of the last judgment. Nor shall we be allowed to pass unnoticed under pretence of ignorance and want of scholarship. If we are ever so good, we shall not be excused from this judgment—if we are ever so bad, we shall not be able to flee from it.

There is then no avoiding it, but we must all appear before our Judge in the last day. *Appear*—that is, be laid open, or made manifest, so the word signifies in the original. For in that day our real character will be seen, the veil of deceit and hypocrisy will be taken off,

and our whole conduct will be set forth in its true colors. Then "the hidden things of darkness will be brought to light," "the counsels of the heart will be made manifest," and every one shall have his reward of God, not according to what he seems, but to what he is.

For how many proud and wicked thoughts do we cherish, which none but God is witness to! How many false or boastful, flattering or uncharitable words do we speak, of which none but God knows the full meaning! And as to our actions, how few (if any scarce) are done out of pure love to him! Even the best things we do, are very often either set about with improper motives, or carried on by improper means. The good we do is very often for an evil end, while for a good end we think we may do anything.

All this secret perverseness and pride of our hearts, which is now known to none but to him, whose "eye is in every place beholding the evil and the good" all shall "appear," and be laid open before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Now, when it is said, that in that great day, all shall be shown forth or made to appear, it can hardly mean that we should *then* be laid open before God, for his eye thoroughly tries and searches us at all times, now as much as then. He is always "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." "He knows what is in man." "Neither is there any creature which is not manifest in his sight, for all things are naked and open" in his eyes. Thus thoroughly does God know what we are:—but some there are who do not yet know us, namely, the angels, other men, and ourselves. To these, therefore, we shall be laid open, and made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ.

First of all, our whole hearts will be set forth before the angels, for though we are taught, that those blessed spirits do continually watch over us for good, and are filled with heavenly joy, when we serve God with regularity, order, and diligence, yet we have no reason to believe that they are now acquainted with the secrets

of our hearts. This is a peculiar right which the Almighty hath reserved to himself alone, calling himself "God that knoweth the hearts," or, as it is properly, the "heart-knowing God." But the angels esteem of us only by our outward conduct; and to this they pay particular regard, as we may gather from different parts of Holy Scripture. But forasmuch as our outward actions do not always show our inward thoughts; in the last day these also will be discovered. And surely if we are not quite hardened to all sense of shame, we must, at least in some degree, be affected by the consideration, that our most secret sins, our most cunning deceits, shall be all laid open by the Judge himself, before that mighty assembly of the blessed and holy angels.

Let us remember, again, that our hearts and lives will be shown forth in their true and proper colors, to all men as well as all angels. Then, it will be seen how different many of our outward actions and words were from our inward thoughts. It will be seen how easy it is to have a fair character in the world, to be reckoned honest, upright, just, liberal, or sober, and yet all the while to be no true servant of Christ Jesus. Then will be seen how little use it is for man to approve, if God disapprove—how little harm it is for man to hate us, if God loves us. Then will be brought to light those many hidden pieces of fraud and cheating, of deceit and cunning, and hypocrisy, which we think men will never know; but in that day they will appear. "There is nothing covered that shall not be" then "revealed, nor hid which shall not be" then "made known" to the whole world. Think, too, that if we will not now, we shall then acknowledge the dreadful nature of sin, when we are about to feel the punishment of it. We shall curse our own folly, for not having sooner laid seriously to heart the great truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though our eyes be now blinded and our hearts hardened by the love of this world, yet, in that day, we shall be of a far different mind. Our hearts will be softened by the terrible sound of the last trumpet, our eyes will be opened by the brightness of the Judge's presence.

But what will that avail? The day of salvation will then be past; according to our lives we must be judged. "Then shall it be too late to knock when the door shall be shut, and too late to cry for mercy when it is the time for justice."



## SERMON III.

## SELF-EXAMINATION.

## ADVENT.

PSALM iv. 4, 5.

“Stand in awe and sin not ;  
Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.  
Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,  
And put your trust in the Lord.”

It was the intention of good and pious men in ancient days, that, as Lent should be a six weeks' preparation for the solemn and sacred festival of Easter, so, before the holy season of Christmas, there should be about half that space, viz. three weeks, set apart ; the weeks of Advent (the word Advent signifying, in Latin, the coming or approach of some great person), for Christians to put their minds in order, as it were, and prepare themselves for the due commemoration of the Lord Jesus' first appearing on earth “for us men, and for our salvation.”

And herein it was thought right to have special reference made to his second Advent ; for this plain and good reason—because we can have no just sense of the importance of his first Advent to redeem us, if our hearts are cold and insensible to the great doctrine of his last coming to judge us.

Whatever people may wish or intend, those, who by the practice of any kind of unchristian behavior have in effect “departed from the living God,” will certainly not return to him in true and lively repentance, will not “cast off the works of darkness, nor put on the armor of light,” unless they pray and strive to have deeply fixed in their conscience, a sense of the approach of that day when their Savior shall “come again in his glorious Majesty to judge both the quick and the dead.”

I consider that in times of trial and perplexity, this is a very fit opportunity to call upon persons, who with hearts more or less distracted with earthly anxieties, are wavering and unsteady in their religious course, though all the while fully aware of the great importance of a right faith and a holy life—I say this seems a suitable occasion to call on such persons (and are not the most of us such, more or less ?) to call on them to take a calm and deliberate view of their spiritual condition ; remembering, on the one hand, that we are no benighted heathens, but persons on whom the light of the everlasting unchangeable gospel hath shined—and on the other, that this nation and society in which we live, though calling itself Christian, and possessing indeed high Christian privileges, yet does certainly sanction many, not only practices, but even principles, quite opposed to, and subversive of the truth of the gospel of Christ. Bearing these things in mind, which to persons of reflection, will, alas ! need no proof, and to others it were vain to address ourselves on such a subject as this : let me endeavor, as briefly as may be, to point out to you what is the right frame of mind, in which we should enter on, and conduct a solemn and serious examination of ourselves, of our condition before God, and of the prospect we have before us for the remainder of our mortal life, and in eternity.

There are, I doubt not many passages in the holy Word of God, from which a considerate person might plainly infer what is the safe course to pursue, in this as in other matters of religious practice. Among others, the instruction contained in this consolatory fourth psalm, if duly reflected on, is quite decisive, and shows us beyond all question, in what frame of heart and mind frail and sinful creatures, sensible of their frailty and sinfulness, and desiring to obtain pardon and peace at the hands of their heavenly Father, should enter on this blessed work, this “one thing needful.”

This I have before suggested to you ; but what I now desire to press on your anxious and candid attention is, that to persons so cast down, and doubtful what their

hope is of pardon and sanctification and final acceptance, and, in fact, how to proceed at all; the divine answer is, nothing mystical and perplexing, nothing implying that our condition is not one of danger and difficulty, nor, again, anything that shall give excuse for feelings of despair, as if there were no hope, or of presumptuous indolence, as if God would bring men to heaven whether they try to serve him or no: nothing of all this is to be found in these oracles of God, but an admonition, at once plain, solemn, encouraging, warning:—

“ Stand in awe and sin not.  
Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.”

which the Holy Spirit immediately subjoins—

“ Offer the sacrifice of righteousness,  
And put your trust in the Lord.”

As long as people are going on in a gay, thoughtless, easy way, in good health and spirits, and their minds fully occupied—with business (perhaps) chiefly; only now and then interrupted by occasional amusements according to their taste—it is next to impossible that religion should gain any solid and lasting hold on their affections. They may, indeed, give occasional attendance on some of its external rules, such as, for example, to go to church, or to a meeting-house, one, or both, or neither, just as custom, or fancy, or convenience may suggest. But this kind of capricious worship alone and by itself, is no evidence of a serious mind; but rather the contrary; it seems to show a light trifling disposition, unworthy of a reflecting heathen, and much more of a professed Christian.

Now it must be confessed, with sorrow and shame, that it too often happens among us, that people go on from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age; all the way along deluding themselves and others with this shallow external service, which passes for religion, but which really has nothing of it but the name.

In some cases, however, and may God's Holy Spirit

increase the number, it pleases his merciful providence by some special trial, say by a dangerous illness, or a severe accident, or by the death or suffering of a neighbor, to put better thoughts before people's minds, not at all compelling or converting them whether they will or no ; but by way of trial and proof of what really is in their hearts. At least this view of God's dealing with men seems most consonant to the voice of reason, experience, and Scripture. And let no person be offended at this way of speaking, as derogating from the honor of God's blessed word ; for certainly, reason and experience are divine gifts and talents as well as Scripture is ; and for the use we make of them as appointed means, whereby to arrive at the knowledge of saving truth, we are greatly accountable to that all-merciful and good Spirit who has provided them for us.

But to return to what I was observing, when careless, thoughtless persons are led by circumstances (or what we call circumstances), to have a serious and deep sense, not merely of the truth and importance of Christian doctrine, but of the personal danger in which themselves (if that doctrine be true) must unquestionably be involved ; they are often more or less inwardly alarmed, though they would not confess it even to themselves, much less to any one else. And to some persons this alarm is so painful that they take all opportunities of flying from it, by avoiding all serious reflections ; by constant habitual drinking, or by seeking always for company as it is called, or reading trifling books or publications, or other such methods of preventing the mind from reflecting inward on itself. How little do such persons consider that in running from these reflections, however painful, they are rejecting the healing medicine afforded by the heavenly Physician ! Supposing, however, that persons have in any case so far yielded to the suggestions of the blessed Spirit, as to cherish in themselves a sincere, though perhaps weak and faint, desire to know and to follow the truth, and to lead different lives from what they have hitherto led ; too often they are immediately checked by numberless perplexities

and difficulties, which before had never entered their minds. (I speak of cases which have happened, and may likely enough happen again in the present condition of the religious world in this kingdom.) I say then that weak persons, when first beginning to be in earnest, and in what St. Paul calls the infancy of their religion, "babes in Christ," are too apt to seize hold of hard places in Scripture, to entangle themselves in high and abstruse speculations, which it is no part of a Christian's duty to inquire into at any time, much less when he is but a beginner in his religious course. These speculations St. Paul warns us, "which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith," are earnestly to be deprecated and avoided. The questions I mean, are such as relate to matters, which though often accounted religious, are in fact merely philosophical; for example, how God's foreknowledge can be reconciled with man's free-will; whether God's true children can fall from grace; whether in this world a man can have a full and positive assurance of final acceptance; these, and such as these, I grant are in themselves great and high subjects; but I contend also they are subjects about which the Almighty has not thought fit to give us clear, if any intimation; therefore, I call them not religious but philosophical, and, as such, what no Christian need trouble himself about. But, as I said before, when people are beginners and novices in religion, they, more frequently than may be imagined, turn aside from the plain path, and entangling themselves in these mysterious speculations, pass off into one of two ways. That either they grow disgusted and amazed by these notions, which yet in many sermons and tracts are set forth as being of the very essence of religion, and so fall back by degrees to their former heathenish courses; or else they grow presumptuous in their fancied illumination, and deceiving themselves and others with the use of long words, and fine sounding expressions, imagine that they have really attained a considerable height in spiritual perfection, when in fact (to use

St. Paul's severe language in a like case), "they knew nothing yet as they ought to know."

Let me then now earnestly advise any person, young or old, who, conscious to himself that the favor of Almighty God, now, and in eternity, is all that is worth seeking for; conscious too that his past years, be they few or many, have been in various respects sadly mispent and wasted—let me advise such an one not to be deterred and kept back from his good purposes by any difficulties or perplexities of this kind; let him resolutely avoid them, and put them out of his mind, as being what in truth they are, unreasonable and unscriptural; unreasonable, I say, *because* unscriptural.

To persons, I say, beginning to see their danger, and to seek for refuge, and desirous to know how to enter on their new and, as to them it naturally appears, difficult course; how plain, how solemn, how encouraging is the warning of the divine Spirit, the Almighty guide and Comforter of the church. Trouble not yourselves with deep and high questions: enter into no speculations about other people's condition; set your thoughts on two great subjects, your own sinfulness and the divine mercy, and let your future life show whether you are in earnest or no:—

"Stand in awe and sin not:  
Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.  
Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,  
And put your trust in the Lord."

Concerning the divinely consolatory warning, let me offer two or three considerations suitable to the present state of religion in this country, and indeed in the Christian world generally.

First, you cannot but observe, how plain, and simple, and unimpassioned, how far from all perplexing notions, and from all rapturous heights and flights of feeling, is the description here given of the repenting convert, the accepted child of God.

The temper and disposition of mind suitable for him is far from all confidence and presumption, ever stand-

ing in awe lest he should again return to sin and folly ; studying more than any other books, the book of his own heart and conscience, understood by the light of Scripture ; in the hours of solitude, and in the watches of the night communing with his own heart—in pain possibly and languor, yet patient and still, and cheerfully acknowledging that he deserves all that is laid upon him. When the day returns with its round of duties, duties of acting or suffering, he devotes his time, his money, his abilities, be they in the world's eyes ever so mean and contemptible, to the welfare of his brethren, friends, and neighbors, and by direct acts of religion to the honor of his Master and Redeemer. And thus consecrating each day to God ; he is content at night to leave the event of each day in God's hands ; thus does he daily offer the sacrifices of righteousness.

Now let no one say, that this is not preaching the gospel ; that this is a poor kind of life, not of a sufficiently exalted description for God's adopted children in Christ Jesus, who have a right to look for more decided inward feelings and assurances of acceptance. Alas ! my poor brethren, how can such as we talk of possessing any right to these consolations of feeling ? Doubtless our state here, so far as it is affected by our fallen nature, is at the best poor and imperfect ; nor is it according to the tenor of holy Scripture to represent it otherwise. Nevertheless, our privileges are neither poor nor imperfect, though our sense of their value may be and is so. And on the possession of these privileges it is that all the hopes of the true Christian are built—hopes founded not on his own fallible feelings, but on the infallible word of God. While, therefore, he offers the sacrifices of righteousness, he puts his trust not in them, but in the Lord, even the Lord Jesus Christ his Redeemer.

This doctrine may be accounted poor and cold, and unevangelical, but it is the doctrine of the psalms, the doctrine of the prophets, the doctrine of the gospel, and therefore it is and ever will be the doctrine of the church.

You may also with good reason take notice in the passage now under our consideration, in what a tone of solemn warning it is delivered. To sincere and seriously-disposed converts, newly devoted to the love and service of Almighty God, it might possibly have been expected that language of congratulation would have been offered, that they would have been told now that they were safe, that they had no occasion for farther fears, that God had adopted them for his own, and that nothing could now overthrow them. But how different is the language of the Holy Spirit, "Stand in awe—sin not—commune with your own hearts in your chamber, and be still."

In these words is clearly implied the greatness of our danger—the danger of forgetting in whose presence we are, and of again drawing back to sin, and, as the apostle to the Hebrews intimates, to perdition. Hence the necessity of our keeping up in our hearts a deep and abiding sense of our frailty and peril, of our retiring, at least in thought, from the world, and communing secretly with our own hearts, casting ourselves before our omniscient Judge with tears of shame and remorse for the past, and quietly waiting and hoping for his consolations, in his good time, according to the thoughts expressed in a beautiful hymn, which is contained in the third chapter of the book called the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and much of which I extremely and repeatedly recommend to the careful perusal and study of all serious persons, especially in times of affliction, for example:—

"The Lord is good unto them that wait for him,  
To the soul that seeketh him.  
It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait  
For the salvation of the Lord.  
It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth:"

"good," that is, for us to have our confidence and high spirit brought down, and to be made to know and feel what we are, and whom we have to depend on.

Let me also suggest to you, to observe how soothing and consoling is the view here presented to us of our



religious state and duties. We are not taught to harass ourselves with perplexing doubts about our final acceptance, to seek after any special inward convictions, as they are called, of feeling; these, whether right or wrong, are plainly not necessary; but it is necessary that we stand in awe, and sin not, and offer the sacrifices of righteousness: then, and not otherwise, we may with cheerful though chastened hope, put our trust in the Lord.

Exactly according to St. Paul's rule for a Christian life, supported by a Christian hope, "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor, and immortality, is offered in Christ Jesus eternal life." So truly evangelical is this psalm.

Lastly, I could wish all persons who are sincerely anxious about their spiritual and eternal condition, to take especial notice how here, as everywhere else, where the outlines of a religious life are traced out for us in Scripture, we are stimulated and encouraged to active exertion, cautioned against trusting to a sluggish inactive profession, a dead faith (in fact), and urged and warned to be fruitful in all substantially good and Christian works. Thus a great deal of watchfulness, practical self-denial, and positive exertion, is implied in the brief directions, "Stand in awe, sin not, commune with your own heart, offer the sacrifices of righteousness." When people have lived a heathenish kind of life, and begin to see the danger of it, they think it a great matter (and so indeed it is), to fall down before God in prayer and confession, to listen to his word with awe, and to become partakers in the blessed communion of his body and blood.

Yet this is not by any means the whole of a Christian life, though it be the food and support of it. We need therefore continually to be warned, that since to us as Christians so much has been given, of us will much, very much, be required. There is evidently, even among religious people, a great deal too much of bargaining and contriving how to serve God with as little trouble and expense as possible, and to make religion

as much as possible comfortable and pleasant to the feelings, and under the fair pretext of honoring the Lord's day, to treat the other days as if they were *not* his days. And other things of the same kind might be mentioned, proving to what a low ebb religion, or what is called religion, is got among us. I advise you therefore, as many of you as really care for these things, no longer to trust to the example of what is called the Christian world, but to think and judge for yourselves, with all humility, according to the measure of understanding which God has vouchsafed to you. And if you will keep on firm, steady, and regular, not regarding small difficulties, nor expecting great encouragements, you will find in the end, that whatever the generality of the people may say, or think, you have chosen the safe and right path. You will exemplify that description which the Bible gives of the sincere servant of God. "The path of the just is as the shining light" (that is, the morning dawn) "which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

So you will be gradually led on by the blessed Spirit, till all your earthly trials and pilgrimage being over, you may lay your heads down in peace and take your rest, in peaceful expectation of the return of your Savior and Judge, to call you from your quiet graves, and to receive you to those mansions of his Father, whither he is now gone to prepare a place for all that love and fear him.

## SERMON IV.

## RELIGIOUS PEACE.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

PSALM cxix. 165. [part xxi. v. 5.]

“Great peace have they which love thy law :  
And nothing shall offend them.”

SINCE the favor of Almighty God is the only object worth a reasonable man's anxiety ; and since, under the gospel dispensation, the one appointed way of obtaining that favor is, by a life of practical holiness, that is, obedience to the revealed will of Jesus Christ ; it is evident, that we should estimate the value of things and events, as they fall in our way, not at all by the degree of present comfort or advantage which they may yield, but by their tendency to set us forward in sound practical religion.

Hence we may see the mistake in which a great many well-disposed people are apt to indulge themselves ; who, fancying religion to be only or chiefly a matter of *feeling*, which it is *not* ; will not be persuaded to consider it as essentially a matter of *practice*, which it *is*. And so, in their great desire to have a strong sense of religious comforts, they too often forget the plainest rules of religious duty. Indeed, this sort of error has a much worse effect, and to a much wider extent, than we are used to suppose ; as any one who seriously considers the subject, and with reference to the conduct of the generality of people, will easily be convinced of.

If such then be the case, if it is of the last importance to us, that we should *be* at peace with Almighty God,

but (in itself) of little or no consequence that we should *feel* so: it might be asked, among many other doubts and objections, why the church, in her admirable collect for this day, directs us to pray that our "merciful Lord would grant to his faithful people" not only "pardon," but "peace" also? For it might be urged, that if all our iniquities and errors are forgiven, we must of course be reconciled to God; and what more have we to desire?

To this it must be answered, and insisted on as a point of the utmost importance in all our views of the nature and obligation of religion, that our being once pardoned does in no way secure us from the possibility of our again falling into sins and errors; that our reconciliation to God by the atoning blood of our Redeemer, to which reconciliation we are admitted at our baptism, is no certain warrant whatever that we shall not again offend, and even ultimately "receive the grace of God in vain."

From this it appears, that we need something more than pardon for the past; namely, assistance for the future: such assistance as shall enable us to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called," and to show our love for Jesus Christ in that one only way which himself hath prescribed; viz. by keeping his commandments."

But, forasmuch as this uniform and sincere obedience to the rules of Christian practice, requires no ordinary degree of courage and self-command; and since these habits of mind are impossible to be maintained, if we are distracted by strong ungovernable feelings of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow; therefore it is of the very essence of practical religion that we should preserve as much as possible a uniform tranquillity, and peace of mind, under all trials and provocations, whether from within or from without us.

Thus then we see with how great reason we are instructed to pray, that "our merciful Lord would grant to us, *both* pardon and peace," not only that "we may be cleansed from all our" past "sins;" but also that we

may be enabled for the future "to serve him with a quiet mind."

Concerning then this religious "peace," or "quietness of mind;" of such consequence to be properly understood, and yet so often mistaken, and with such hurtful effects; we shall scarcely in any part of Holy Scripture find a more distinct and edifying account of it, than in the words just now rehearsed. "Great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them."

For, from hence we learn, first, what religious "peace" really is; and secondly, how we may know certainly whether or not we possess it. And these in fact are the only two points relating to the subject, which are of importance in the way of practice.

First, we observe, that true religious "peace" consists in maintaining a sincere "love" of Almighty God, and of his declared will: "Great peace have they which love thy law."

Now, by the "law of God," here spoken of, may be understood, either the exercise of that providential power by which he sustains, governs, and directs the whole course of the world, the circumstances of nations and of individuals; or, more strictly, that revealed law of life and conduct, by which we are bound wholly to regulate ourselves, as they who must hereafter "give an account of their own works."

Considering the expression in the first of these significations, they who "love God's law," in whatever degree, will have a proportionate sense of his power, wisdom, and goodness, as displayed in all events. They will be loath to ascribe the various changes which are incessantly taking place around them, to the operation of a set of heathen names, such as "good and bad luck," "fortune," "chance," "fate," and "necessity;" but in the whole course of things, as well as in each particular event, however apparently of small consequence, will acknowledge the providential control of an Almighty hand.

But in the expression of "*loving* God's law," is evi-

dently implied something more than merely an acknowledgment of its authority—viz. a cheerful acquiescence in all its dispensations, under a sincere and sober conviction, that our heavenly Father not only sees what is best for us, while we are almost, or quite in the dark about it; but also that he seeks and contrives our happiness far more anxiously than we do ourselves, or our best friends for us. And this, though commonly allowed in words as a matter of course, is *by no means* so commonly acted upon. We are ready enough to believe that Almighty God sees and governs all events, but not so certain that his dispensations are really the best possible for our own particular and personal advantage, that is, in other words, we are more ready to acknowledge “God’s law,” than to “love” it.

“Great,” however, “is the peace of those who do love” it in the way we have been describing. For, whereas, their own natural inclination would lead them into all sorts of fears and murmurings, of doubts and anxieties; this heavenly principle, if duly cherished, is of itself able to keep their minds tranquil, and fit for every active duty. This, in great public calamities, in times of pestilence or famine, of war and commotion, or other such visitations, would hold the heart of the true Christian still steady to its great and final object. This same principle, too, in the less public, though not less trying, scenes of affliction, such, for example, as the loss of health, of property, of character, or of friends, would afford thorough and effectual support;—thorough and effectual, because founded not on a transient emotion of strong feelings, but on a cool and deliberate conviction of the truth of our holy religion.

In this point of view then, may it most truly be asserted that “great is the peace of those who love God’s law.”

But it is more important still that we consider the “law” here spoken of in its strict and proper sense, viz. as that complete rule of conduct, by which we are to direct our actions now, and to be judged in the last day. Which rule may be shortly set forth in the powerful language of the Holy Spirit, thus—that “denying ungodli-

ness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world."

And here also a very little reflection will enable us to see how true it is, that "great is the peace of those who love God's law."

Thus, the gospel demands of us all a life of self-denial, and this in two respects—of "ungodliness" and of "worldly lusts."

In regard of the former of these, "great is the peace of those who love God's law;" for whereas in their present fallen condition, they are tempted on innumerable occasions of daily life to forget God, to murmur and complain against his dispensations, to think lightly of religion, its ordinances, and its ministers; to be negligent about prayer and communion with God; and, particularly, to slight the great doctrines, the atonement and intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the sanctifying influences of his Holy Spirit, yet their love for God and his blessed will, enables them resolutely to "deny" all such "ungodliness;" by "the shield of faith" they can "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

Again, knowing that we are required to "deny" not only "ungodliness," but also "worldly lusts," they make up their mind to "love this law" of God also.

They do not therefore debate how they may serve God with the least trouble to themselves, or draw back on their own comforts, but setting to work as to a business which they "love," they are continually practising some mortification on themselves, on their pride, their indolence, their desire of ease and pleasure.

And, by these habits of self-denial, they attain by degrees to such "peace" and "quietness of mind" as (however far it may be from *true* happiness) yet far surpasses in substantial delights what is called a life of ease and enjoyment. And the foundation of this is the consciousness of doing that, which our merciful Lord and Master cannot but approve of.

But as disciples of Christ Jesus, something more is required of us than habits of what may be called negative goodness. We must not only "deny ungodliness

and worldly lusts," but also actually "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." "Soberly," that is, with continual watchfulness and self-mastery; "righteously," that is, with a strict regard to the real welfare of others; and "godly," that is, in the constant exercise of all the direct acts of piety and religion.

And let us just observe how "great must be the peace of those who love these laws" evangelical. First, for those who "love" to "live *soberly*," in the full and proper meaning of the expression.

They are thoroughly and heartily satisfied with their own condition in life, whatever it be. They are sincerely indifferent to the temptations of worldly prosperity, in whatever form it shows itself; not indeed despising it but very well able to do without it. They can bear scorn, ridicule, or reproach from others, without anger at the time, or malice afterward, and this because they "love the law" of humility. They are glad to guard against all possible excesses in eating, drinking, or clothing, because they "love the law" of temperance and chastity. The approach of poverty and destitution, of pain, sickness, and death, does not alarm and distract them, such changes being no more than they have always been expecting. Indeed, to those who think of the *final* change, the *unalterable* sentence which awaits us, every other must needs seem but a trifle.

Again, "great" also "is the peace of those who love" to live "*righteously*," that is, with a sincere love of all others; for nothing else can be called "righteous living" among Christians.

For, whereas it is the want of this "love" which causes so much quarreling, malice, and unkindness in the world, the possession of it would at once produce "peace" and harmony, if not in others toward us, yet in us toward others. For people are apt to think it enough, if they behave honestly to the honest, and kindly to the kind, forgetting that the duties we owe to others are to be paid for *our own* sake, as well as for theirs. Our love for them is to be founded on our love for



Christ Jesus and "his holy laws;" and this many even well-disposed persons do not consider, and thereby entangle themselves in innumerable errors, and also miss the obtaining of that "peace" which attends those who "love" to live "righteously," and to do good to all for Christ's sake.

"Great is the peace" also of those "who love" to live "godly" in this present world of darkness and corruption! For "having their affections set on things above," and their "conversation in heaven," they sit loose to all the interests of this transitory state. They take refuge from the cares and vexations of life, and from the innumerable temptations to sin which surround us, in prayer and communion with their heavenly Comforter and Redeemer. Meditation on the great doctrines of the gospel, and the remembrance of what the blessed Jesus had done and suffered for us, are to them an un-failing source of consolation, a substantial defence against murmuring and perplexing thoughts.

And while, if it were not for this "love" of "godliness," their hearts would be distracted with a vain pursuit of business or comforts; they have now all their thoughts and wishes directed to that one great and final end, which is alone fit for the aim of such as we are—accountable and immortal creatures.

Thus then does true "peace" consist in the "love of God's laws," both in regard to what he would have us suffer, and what he would have us to do. And so seeing what true peace of mind *is*, we may the more clearly ascertain what it is *not*.

It is not an affected contempt toward all religion, a cool indifference about what we are now, and what we must come to hereafter. This, though so often made a show of, yet can never be the same with true peace of mind, because it has nothing solid or substantial to rest upon; for, though many attempts have been made, yet no one has ever been able to show that the Christian religion is false. And this at least ought to be done, before a man can be a sound conscientious infidel.

Again, true "peace" does not consist in an easy con-

fidence about our condition, grounded on notions such as these—that our good actions will make up for our faults—that we are no worse than other people—that some errors are excusable and unavoidable—that we must not be “righteous overmuch.” If we allow ourselves to be satisfied with such poor arguments as these, we may be sure (however easy we are inclined to make ourselves) that we do not possess that “peace” which attends the “love of God’s law.” For such pretences are an endeavor to lower, not to heighten, the obligation of that law; which those who really “loved” it could never endure to do.

Nor again does religious “peace” consist in a presumption that we are peculiarly in God’s favor, above others; or in a confidence that by some special act of grace we are incapable of falling away from him: a presumption this, and a confidence, often founded on enthusiastic feelings, which, whatever else they are, are not the fruits of that Spirit who is “the author of peace, and lover of concord,” the only fountain of humility, meekness, and charity.

Thus does true religious “peace” consist in the “love of God’s law,” in that, and in nothing else. The Holy Ghost, however, knowing how apt we should be to deceive ourselves, to fancy we have this peace and love, when in reality we have not, has subjoined a rule and test by which to try ourselves in this respect; concerning which we will offer a few considerations, and so conclude.

“Great peace have they who love God’s law; *and nothing shall offend them;*” offend, that is, make them to stumble or fall; for in that sense the word is generally used in the Sacred Writings.

Whosoever then truly loves God’s law, “nothing will offend him”—nothing will be of power sufficient to turn him aside from his steady course of faithful obedience.

Thus, as he sincerely “loves” to live *soberly*, so whatever difficulties or obstacles occur, he is not “offended,” will not give up his resolution. The ridicule and

scorn of thoughtless people, the loss of many comforts and advantages, the necessity of maintaining constant watchfulness and circumspection, these things he readily and even gladly complies with, for his love of the law of God, which, however, without that love, would be absolutely intolerable.

Again, as he “loves” to live *righteously*, so “nothing will offend him” in the practice of it. Accordingly, in all matters of business, he maintains the strictest truth and honesty, knowing, however, very well that he shall, in many instances, be laughed at and despised for it. He is uniformly compassionate to those in distress, forgiving to his enemies, kind and loving to all men. Objections, indeed, to this sort of conduct are thrown in his way at every step, and some very specious ones; but they do not “offend” him, or turn him aside from his resolved principle of “living righteously” in a world of unrighteousness.

And again, as he “loves” to live *godly*, so “nothing will offend him” in this respect also—nothing will prevent his availing himself of all the privileges which accompany the practice of true devotion. Hence he endeavors to make everything which befalls him, the occasion of some direct religious act of confession, faith, or thanksgiving. He is sure to be found in God’s house, and at the Lord’s table, at all opportunities; and only laments that those opportunities come so seldom. He can bear with good temper the sneers and ridicule of thoughtless people, and does not mind being called a hypocrite, or a methodist, or other such names. Thus, because “he loves God’s law,” he is determined that “nothing shall offend him,” and that he will continue, in spite of all difficulties, to maintain the exercise of his high Christian privileges.

On the whole, then, it appears, that true peace of mind does not consist in carelessness about religion altogether, or in a presumptuous confidence of any sort, but wholly and only in a practical love of God’s laws. And we may know that we possess this peace in any degree in proportion as we are determined that nothing

shall offend us, that we will gladly make any sacrifice, submit to any loss, trouble, or mortification, sooner than displease Almighty God.

If this be *not* our mind, whatever be our feelings of confidence, we cannot have religious peace; and if this *be* our mind, whatever be our occasional doubts and misgivings, we cannot really be without this peace.

And this is a truth, in many points of view, of great importance to be attended to, but chiefly in regard of its tendency to draw off our minds from vain hopes, fears, and fancies, and to set them on that which is the one great concern of us all, a steady, practical regard to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## SERMON V.

## SAINTS' DAYS AND DAILY SERVICE.

1 SAM. xiv. 6.

“It may be that the Lord will work for us ;  
For there is no restraint to the Lord,  
To save by many or by few.”

AMONG the many great advantages and comforts which would attend the due observation of Saints' days, we may observe the opportunity which is given us, on such occasions, of distinctly calling to mind what difficulties and trials the faithful servants of God have in all ages been subject to, and by what means it was that they were enabled to stand firm in those trials, and to overcome those difficulties.

Especially we may call to mind, how regular, earnest, constant, and devout they must have been in holding communion with Almighty God in prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving ; both in obedience to the solemn and repeated commands of their Savior—and, also, because it is by prayer alone, that the heart can be effectually raised above this present world, and rendered steady and courageous in “fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold on eternal life.”

Moreover the difficulties which stand in people's way in regard of exercising the duty or privilege of prayer (for it is both a duty and a privilege)—these difficulties must have been the same to the apostles and first Christians as to ourselves. For human nature has always been the same, and the miraculous spiritual gifts which were shed on the church in its infancy, did not at all affect the *moral* character of those who possessed them. That was left as it was before.

It was possible for a man to speak with the tongue of angels—to understand all mysteries—to have faith so as to remove mountains—and yet with all these to be without charity, the true practical love of God. This St. Paul assures us, and from it we learn, among other important truths, that the trial of men's sincerity in religion is not greater now than it was formerly—that the apostles, saints, and martyrs in the primitive church, though living (as it were) in the midst of miracles, and themselves able to work them, were yet liable to weakness, sorrow, and suffering like ourselves; like ourselves were tempted in various ways to renounce their religion—that is, the practice of it; were tempted, when they saw the contempt and neglect which it everywhere met with, to distrust the divine promises, and to fear, lest after all, they had been, perhaps, deceived, and were trusting to false hopes. What, then, I mean to say is this, that the consideration of what those holy men formerly submitted to, for the gospel's sake, should be a great encouragement to all God's faithful servants, in every age, to follow their example.

We are to consider the truth as it is in itself, not whether it is followed by many or by few. We are to practise our plain positive duties, without staying to inquire whether or not other people think it necessary to do the same.

All this rule, as it is to be applied to our whole duty as Christians, so, especially, to the obligations which we are under to hold continual communion with our Father and Redeemer in prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving.

There is nothing more earnestly impressed on the first Christians than this obligation is by St. Paul—plainly, because he saw how much they were in danger of being led away by evil example in this respect, and, also, because he well knew the value of sincere prayer and intercession. He knew who it was that had said—“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” And here let me observe, that the rule plainly laid down by our Lord and Master, viz., that our belief is not to be according to

what we see, that is, that our faith is not to be regulated by outward appearances ; this rule, I say, is peculiarly applicable to correct the prevailing erroneous notions respecting church communion.

The common notion of course is, that what most people approve of, is true ; that where there is a large congregation, *that* proves that the truth is preached, and where a small one, that it is not so.

Yet, doubtless, we are rather taught in the Bible that the many are wrong, and the few right, so far as that we are not to trust to the opinions or practices of many, merely because they are many. Let this be applied to the consideration of people's observance or neglect, as of Saints' days ; so, of the daily service so particularly enjoined by the church.

I purpose, then, on the present occasion, merely to offer a few observations on the great blessing and advantage of our being able thus to meet together, day after day, in God's own consecrated house—and this, be we ever so few in number.

“ It may be that the Lord will work for us  
For there is no restraint to the Lord,  
To save by many or by few.”

I consider then, in the first place, that in meeting thus continually, the church intends we should make an earnest prayer for each other especially—that we may come to this sacred habitation, not from outside form or custom, but with full and earnest desires to worship our God in spirit and in truth, that is, to pray earnestly and live according to our prayers—that we may learn more and more, to form a true notion of ourselves and our own condition, our pitiable, fallen, helpless state—that we may still go on increasing in love and gratitude toward God our Savior, still more and more convinced of our own corrupt state, and of the necessity of our placing all our hope and confidence in the atonement of his precious blood, and the sanctifying aid of his Holy Spirit—that, to prove the sincerity of our perfect love to God, we may be more and more earnest

in practising it toward our neighbors, in all possible ways of kindness, forbearance, patience, gentleness, and sincere endeavors for their real good.

Thus should we pray for each other with humble hopes, that as we meet here in God's house, to celebrate his daily appointed service, so we may all meet at last, in those heavenly habitations where we shall never more be separated from him, or from one another.

In the next place, we should never forget to pray for those who would come if they could—for those whose delight it would be to be present here day after day, were they not utterly prevented by illness, old age, distance, or press of family business.

Some such there are, though, perhaps, but a few; but be they few or many, we who *can* come here, are bound to remember them in our intercessions at the throne of grace—to pray that *that* blessing may descend upon them which is promised to those “who hunger and thirst after righteousness;” that their ardent wishes to join in prayer and praise with God's church on earth, may be abundantly fulfilled, if not here, according to their present desire, yet, hereafter, by their admission to his eternal rest—that whatever be the occasion of their absence, whether old age, or distance, or any other unavoidable cause, it may still be sanctified to them, and their loss supplied with heavenly consolation—that they may still be able to say, from the bottom of their hearts,

“Lord! I have loved the habitation of thy house,  
The place where thine honor dwelleth.”

Thus should we pray for those who would desire to come hither, but are unable; who are absent from us, yet are present in heart.

We seem, too, especially bound to remember in our daily prayers all sick, destitute, or otherwise distressed persons, who come within our knowledge.

If we are but sincere, how do we know what a blessing our prayers may bring down, be we ever so few in number to offer them.



How many are there in this parish, lying on the bed of sickness—some on the bed of death! These surely need our daily prayers.

How many are there suffering under every variety of pain, sorrow, and distress, known, perhaps, only to God and themselves! Many, many such, there are in this parish. These surely need our daily prayers.

How many are there, alas! how many indeed, who are going on headlong in all kinds and degrees of errors; errors in faith—errors in practice;—who have shut their ears that they cannot hear, and their hearts that they cannot understand. “Every one turning to to his course, as the horse rusheth to the battle.” My brethren! how can we be sufficiently earnest and frequent in our prayers for all who are in error, and not for them only, but for ourselves also, that while we think we stand, we take heed lest we fall! This should be our daily, hourly prayer. For, indeed, errors in religious truth, which relate to doctrine or practice, however little may be thought of them in the present state of the Christian world, must certainly be of very heavy consequence. Therefore, how earnestly should we pray “that all who profess and call themselves Christians,” especially those in this parish, “may hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.”

For so alone can we have any reasonable ground of hope, any of us, of reaping that high and transcendent reward, held out to us through the mediation and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

With these solemn thoughts, these anxious desires for the good of one another, and of all around us, should we enter this awful house of the Lord from day to day. So may we hope, small as our assembly is, yet that he in whom we trust will work for us; will send down his blessing on ourselves, and on all whom we pray for;

“For there is no restraint to the Lord,  
To save by many or by few.”

It seems farther to be considered, that daily and hourly blessings need daily and hourly thanks. If we pray in the evening that our God would of his great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of the approaching night; are we not in the morning to be thankful for the wonderful protection afforded us? If we pray in the morning that our heavenly Father, who hath brought us safe to the beginning of another day, would defend us in the course of the same, by his mighty power; when the shadows of the evening draw on, what can we do, but still thank him for his continual protection, still ask him for more! Thus, as the psalmist says, with those who sincerely love God, "Day unto day uttereth speech; night unto night showeth knowledge." They are led gradually forward by a chain of holy services, link within link, till they come to the close of their earthly probation, and their faint whisperings of prayer and praise, in this earthly tabernacle of their Lord, shall be turned into the songs of angels and glorified spirits, in his eternal and beatific presence.

There is another thing of great importance to be mentioned, as belonging to the daily service of the church, and that is, the care that has been taken to have portions of Holy Scripture constantly read. It may indeed be said, that a person may hear or read the Bible at home, with quite as much advantage as by going to church to hear it. But it should be considered that in this, as in other respects, we are most likely to have a blessing from our God, if we seek him (as the prophet says), in the way of his ordinances; if we hear his own word, in his own house, from his own minister.

To a considerate Christian, all these things are of value. They conspire together to strengthen his faith, and to confirm his hope. The world, indeed, alas! that it should be so, the Christian world has learned to treat these things with levity and indifference, I might say too often with scorn and contempt. And hence it is come to pass as a notorious fact, that great numbers who will listen to what are called sermons, in any place

and from any person, will pay little or no regard to the solemn reading of God's own word by his own appointed ministers and ambassadors;—conduct this, which cannot but too forcibly remind one of that memorable and cutting declaration of the blessed Jesus himself.

“ I am come in my Father's name,  
And ye receive me not:  
If another should come in his own name,  
Him ye are willing to receive.”

No serious person, no really serious person, can contemplate such a state of things as this, without sincere sorrow and alarm. There is indeed no probability that in this respect (or perhaps in any other), the world will ever be better than it is now. Rather, we may expect that it will go on growing more and more corrupt to the last; that while the word of God is talked of, the word of man will be followed.

Yet still all persons of real serious thoughts and sound judgment will, by the blessing of God, be able to see through the mist that surrounds them. They will take refuge from disputes and controversies in the pure unsullied truths of the Bible itself. They will see of what value and importance it is, that portions of the Bible itself should be constantly read in our ears, without comment or explanation;—not because comments and explanations are not very useful in their places, but because, if they are constantly used, the minds of men will be more turned to them than to the Scripture itself, more (as I may say) to the sermon than to the text. How happy then should we think ourselves in having every day through the year some considerable portion of God's own book solemnly offered to our thoughts in the church service. And here again, as before, we are not to ask whether the matter is considered in this serious light by the generality of Christians; that is not the question; but whether this is not the true way in which it should be considered, be they few, or be they many, who are disposed so to do.

Nothing then remains, but that we endeavor more

and more to live up to our professions ; that as we have such holy psalms, such devout prayers, such awful lessons from day to day ; we should also from day to day labor unceasingly, that our whole behavior may become proportionably more holy, devout, and filled with an awful sense of the divine presence, that from day to day, we gather up a still increasing store of heavenly knowledge, showing itself in holy practice, in still increasing love to God and charity to all men ; and, more than all, that we still keep a stricter watch over ourselves, feeling more and more our own worthlessness and inefficiency ; that our only hope of pardon for the past, must be in the blood of our Redeemer ; our only hope of assistance for the future, in the gracious influences of his Holy Spirit.

## SERMON VI.

## DEATH OF YOUNG PERSONS.

INNOCENTS' DAY.

REV. xiv. 5.

“They are without fault before the throne of God.”

WHEN children and young persons are snatched away by (what we call) an untimely death, people are used, following the natural course of their feelings, to esteem such events as proper subjects for sorrow and regret. And with persons of tender affections, or under peculiar circumstances, this sorrow is sometimes cherished to such a degree as is obviously hurtful, and in many ways unreasonable.

Sometimes, indeed, men are to be met with, who professedly regard with indifference these startling proofs of human frailty and mortality. Whether it be, that they are naturally of greater coldness and insensibility than others, or whether (which is more probable) the business and engagements of the world prevail, by degrees, to deaden the affections, and to make men anxious about little beyond their own present interests and comforts.

But however, generally speaking, whether it be the real expression of their feelings, or taken up (as it were) out of civility, and in compliance with the notions of others, people are used, as was before observed, to speak of and consider the death of young persons, as more or less a fit matter for lamentation and regret. At least, it is taken for granted that such feelings are allowable in their near friends and relations, if not demanded of them, as a sort of duty.

Whether this view of the matter be a right one, or, if there be any mistakes in it, what these mistakes are, and how they should be guarded against, is evidently, as a point of practice, very proper for our inquiry, very proper at all times and to all persons; but I think, perhaps, particularly for *us*, just now.

It is then worth observing, in regard of the subject we are upon, that, as people are used to compassionate the sickness and death of the young, so commonly they regard with little sorrow, and often with real satisfaction and comfort, the decease of old persons, or of those who have been long or painfully afflicted with disease.

Now, in this latter case, the case of the very old and infirm, it is evident that in thinking and acting as we do, we are governed entirely, or chiefly, by our feelings, without giving much consideration and thought to the matter. This, I say, is evident, because the very mention of any person's dying in extreme feebleness or pain, calls from us some expression, not of regret, but of satisfaction (for example, that it is "a happy release"). And any one who should wish to have the life of another prolonged under such melancholy circumstances, would be thought almost cruel and unkind. It does not, perhaps, come into our thoughts at all what sort of person he was, how he had lived, or how he died; almost the only impression on our mind is, that he was in great distress and wretchedness, and that he is now "happily released" from it. And this impression, is what I say, has little or nothing to do with *reason* and consideration, but is merely made on our *feelings* at the moment.

Whether it be in itself a right or wrong impression, is another question. At all events, it cannot be much to be depended on, because it is not produced by sound reason and reflection.

Now, it is just in the same manner with this, guided by their feelings rather than by calm consideration, that people are apt to regard the early death of children and young persons. They see an end (as they

think) put to all the fair promises and hopes of their after life—they consider them as flowers cut off in the spring, whose bud is not suffered to blossom, or their blossom to ripen into fruit—they consider the life of man, so short at the longest, made even shorter by a premature death—they consider what these young ones might have been, if they had been permitted to live; how their good qualities would have improved, and how their faults, if any had yet shown themselves, would have given way to better principles. Lastly, they remember their own loss, be it more or less, and are certainly inclined to think it hard, that when there are (as they suppose) so few real comforts in this life, Almighty God should deprive them of one of the purest and most innocent.

In this way, it will probably be found, that the generality of people consider the death of children. Even those who are well and religiously disposed do so, and for the reason above given; because they suffer themselves to be led too much by the example of others, and their own feelings, and do not by any means bring home to themselves, as might reasonably be expected of them, the true and real state of the case. And what this is, is the very point which now remains for our consideration.

And here let us observe, that, as it is a subject about which men's feelings are particularly apt to be interested, it is highly necessary, at least if we wish to get at the truth, that we should make our inquiry with coolness and impartiality, and not take for granted that an opinion is right, merely because it is in harmony with our feelings: no, not even though it should be generally allowed and cherished by good sort of people. For, in all matters of practice, we can scarcely be too cautious.

Now considering ourselves *merely* as creatures of this world, weak and short-lived, and standing in need of comforts of all sorts, to make our condition at all happy, or even tolerable; it cannot be denied, that parents and friends would have great reason to lament

the death of children, for thereby they would be deprived of a considerable part of their own happiness. Looking to this world *only*, too, we might, with some reason, perhaps, be sorry for those who are banished from it, so soon after they have set foot in it, nor are suffered to enjoy the goods and pleasures (whatever they may be) which are to be found here.

In this point of view, the death of young persons might excite sorrow in us, as well for their sakes, as for our own. But now, how can this be a right point of view, to us Christians at least, whatever it might have been to others? For let us only suppose Christianity to be true—and let us remember the condition in which we see the world at this day—and then perhaps the fondest parent could scarcely wish that his children might live to grow up.

First, then, suppose Christianity to be true. This may perhaps sound strange, to say “*suppose* Christianity to be true;” as if we did not know it for certain. But the fact is, we only talk and think about it as if it were true; we live and act as if it were false, or at least very doubtful.

I say then, suppose Christianity to be true; Christianity such as it is represented to us in the New Testament. Then it is evident that settled opinions and habits, such as these following, must be of necessity required of all baptized Christians, that is, if they think to be any the better for their religion.

To have on our minds a deep conviction of our own fallen and corrupted condition, and of the wonderful mercy of Almighty God, in having reconciled us to himself by the death of his Son, and restored us to the possibility of attaining eternal happiness. To acknowledge the infinite love of the blessed Jesus, in suffering as he did for us; the infinite value of that atonement, which he wrought for us on the cross; and the utter unreasonableness of looking anywhere else but to him, for pardon and final salvation.

To feel also the infinite importance of having him for our friend, and his Holy Spirit for our guide and



comforter, so as to make up our minds to this, as to an absolute certainty, that as nothing can make up to us for the want of Christ's favor, so with his favor and protection, we have nothing to fear, either here or hereafter; and, by consequence, that the one only proper business of our lives is, to do what is pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such are the settled opinions, which may in reason be expected, and indeed are expected, of every baptized Christian, who is old enough to see and consider his condition.

Habits of life, also of a piece with these opinions, are with equal reason expected of us. That we should, actually, and in the whole business and employment of every day, live and behave as people of another country, strangers and sojourners here. That we should therefore, as our only hope and comfort, strive to hold unceasing communion with Almighty God, in prayer, and at his holy table.

That we should bear *all* evils, from whatever quarter they may come, with patience and meekness; not indeed without reason, but remembering that Jesus Christ bore much more for us, than ever we can for him, that these trials are our only opportunities of showing our love to him; and moreover, that we are not left to ourselves, but are *sure* of the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit; at least, if we choose to follow his guidance, and accept his assistance. That we should love every body for Christ's sake, always remembering, that what we do to others, whether it be good or evil, he reckons as done to himself. That we should be very thoughtful and circumspect in our whole conduct, ever remembering that we "are not our own, but are bought with a price;" and that both within and without us, there are many and powerful enemies, always on the watch to draw us out of the narrow way.

Opinions and practices of this sort are unquestionably required of all who are admitted by baptism "into the fellowship of Christ's religion." In every part of the New Testament it seems taken for granted (as it were)

that all who think "to come unto God by Jesus Christ," shall make up their minds to live, as much as possible, in the manner above described. I say, take any chapter, almost in any part of the Testament, and it will be scarce possible to understand it properly, except in this point of view.

And yet, looking with any attention to the Christian world around us, which professes to believe and to follow this very same book, we cannot but perceive that people's practices, and opinions too, are much at variance with those which we have above described as so reasonable and necessary—indeed, often quite contrary to them.

And that is the great matter of alarm; that people's opinions and practices are *both* deliberately wrong. Because, if their actions only were sometimes wrong, and their notions and opinions still, in the main, correct, there would be some ground left to hope for repentance and amendment. But when people do not wish or desire to be much better than they are; when nothing will convince them but that they are as good, or nearly as good, as they need be; their situation becomes, in the highest degree, alarming.

Yet surely it would not be too much to say, that this *is* (more or less) the situation of the generality of Christians. It is not merely that so many transgress the positive commands of our blessed Savior, and slight his ordinances; but there is evidently a general carelessness and presumptuousness about religion: practical holiness is put in the back ground; religion is made to consist in questions and disputings, or in a *mere* customary attendance on outward forms. In the meanwhile, there is little or no serious anxiety, no active preparation for eternity, nor even a hearty wish or endeavor after such preparation. The heart remains fixed and set on this world with a stubbornness and determination which we could scarcely believe possible, if we did not, alas! so commonly feel it in ourselves, and witness the effects of it in others.

There is, too, another sort of error, appearing indeed

very different from this indolence and worldly-mindedness, yet, perhaps, quite as evil in itself, and quite as hurtful in its effects on us. And this is, pride, showing itself in the form of religious enthusiasm and self-righteousness. An error which has more influence perhaps, even on good men, than they are aware of, and which prevails much in these days. On this account then, and because also pride is of all things the most hateful in the sight of Almighty God, how is it possible for us to be too much on our guard against so ruinous and so deceitful a vice; deceitful, I say, because it often puts on the appearance of virtue; and is generally held in high honor and esteem among men, even among Christians, the professed disciples of *him*, who humbled himself to the form of a slave, to the shame and death of the cross.

Upon the whole, then, supposing Christianity to be true, as it is set forth to us in the New Testament, and the Christian world to be in a condition in which we all see it is, it will necessarily follow, that the difficulties and dangers which surround our condition are exceedingly great, greater, perhaps, than we have any notion of; that true religion is at this day persecuted by the worst of enemies—lukewarmness on the one side, and enthusiasm on the other, and that to keep clear of these two extremes requires infinite caution, constant labor and watchfulness all our lives through.

In such a state of things, then, as this, can a considerate parent, who does not confine his views just to things present—can such an one be called unfeeling or unreasonable if he be not very anxious for the longer life of his children? Certainly it should seem, that to complain and grieve much when they are early taken away, however it may be the custom with the generality even of well-disposed people, it is by no means reasonable, considering how much Christian religion requires of all its professors, and what infinite danger there is lest even those who are tolerably well instructed in their younger years, should in after-life yield to the bad examples which are everywhere set them.

But there is yet a higher and more positive ground of consolation than this, on which we are permitted to rest, when we see children cut off from us by a premature death. There is the best reason for supposing that the change is to them really a happy one. People are apt indeed to make no doubt of this, without giving much consideration to the matter. It is better that we should examine a little on what foundation such an opinion rests, that so, if it appear to be a true one, we may derive that comfort and satisfaction from it which it ought to afford us.

There are, perhaps many considerations which would lead us to this opinion, but we will only take one or two, which seem most obvious.

One argument may be derived from the nature of baptism, and from the form of administering it in our church.

For baptism is nothing less than a pledge of our new birth, that is, of the stain of original sin being washed out by the blood of the lamb. But if the infant is capable of being admitted into God's covenant of grace, into the ark of Christ's visible church on earth, what is to hinder the possibility of its being also admissible to that glorified church in heaven? And hence the church gives it as her deliberate opinion, that "children which are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved." And though this may be supposed to be applicable only to mere infants, yet we may reasonably believe that older children, as they are capable of actual sin, are also capable of faith and repentance, of a sincere love of our blessed Savior, and a desire to obey him. Let us not then doubt, that children who have lived and died with these dispositions, shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the beginning of the world, and purchased for them by his blood who "died for all."

Another argument may be derived from the manner in which our Savior constantly speaks of young children, and from the pains which he took to show his re-

gard for them. This argument is a very strong one, and deserving of much consideration.

Lastly, we may observe that that remarkable passage in the Revelation of St. John, of which the text is a part, may well be applied to this same subject. Indeed such an application is sanctioned by high authority, that of the church, who has selected this very portion of Scripture to be read instead of the epistle on Innocent's day. "These," says the apostolic prophet, speaking of the company of the redeemed ones, who stood with the Lamb on the Mount Sion: "These are they which follow the Lamb wheresoever he goeth; these were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God, and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of God."

Nothing then remains to us, but that we endeavor to follow the example of these innocent children, according to the advice, or rather the solemn warning of our blessed Lord himself—"Except (said he) ye become like them, ye shall certainly not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Also that we labor to keep our hearts, like theirs, pure and spotless from all kinds of pollution, our hands from dishonesty and violence, our tongues from evil-speaking, filthiness, and blasphemy, from angry and abusive language, from lying and slandering; that we keep ourselves always prepared for death, since we are as likely to be called away in the morning as in the evening of life—above all, that we constantly keep ourselves ready against the great and final day of account, lest we be put to shame before men and angels as slothful and unprofitable servants; and lest, when in that day our children shall be received into the bosom of their Savior, to joy and immortality, we their elders, who ought to have been their examples and patterns in all that is good, shall be separated from them for ever; and not from them only, but from the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, and from that happiness and rest which is alone to be found in him.

## SERMON VII.

## VALUE OF TIME.

ECCLES. ix. 10.

“ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,  
Do it with thy might :  
For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom,  
In the grave—whither thou goest.”

WHEN our Lord charged us all so earnestly as he did, to “ take no thought for the morrow,” not to allow cares and anxieties about the future to occupy our hearts, his purpose was (among others) to make us understand the value of time present, and the necessity of not letting it run to waste.

For very often, under pretence of providing for things future, we neglect our present immediate duties, or at least perform them in such a careless thoughtless manner as but too plainly proves that our hearts are not in the work.

Nothing scarcely can be thought of, of more consequence to us all, than the danger we are in of not endeavoring to make the most of the time present, day after day.

And wherein this danger consists, and how we may guard against it ;—this is what I would now earnestly desire to call your attention to ;—at least such of you as are at all disposed to serious thought, and preparation for those changes which are drawing on.

To every Christian soul, then, the solemn, I should say the awful warning, is surely addressed, whether we choose to pay regard to it or not—or whether our regard be only formal and transitory, or deep, lasting, and practical.

“Whatever thy hand findeth to do,  
Do it with [all] thy might,  
For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom,  
In the grave—whither thou goest.”

Let us consider a little, in what does the danger consist, against which we are here put on our guard.

It appears upon the calmest consideration, that the business of this world, even that which is most important and most necessary, considered only in itself, and as belonging to this world, is in fact of small consequence, perhaps one might say, of none at all.

At least, things are commonly thought of no value if the possession of them is thought sure to be very brief, or extremely uncertain.

For instance, if a person were laboring and slaving to get a large fortune, and were told for certain that after he had obtained it, he must part with it all in two or three weeks, he would at once say that if he must lose it so soon after he had it, it was not worth the trouble of endeavoring after, and would consequently give over his endeavors.

Or if a person were in bad health, and were told that if he followed such and such rules, he would recover indeed, but must not expect to keep his good health for more than a week or two, and then be as ill again as ever, he would naturally think such a recovery scarcely worth having, nor would he take the trouble to submit to rules for obtaining it.

And so in other cases of what are called matters of business, it seems to be commonly allowed, that if we think ourselves sure to be deprived of our advantages very soon after we possess them, we have little or no desire to obtain them.

Why, then, it may be asked, do people trouble themselves so much as they do about this world's goods, of which they must be of necessity so soon deprived ?

The answer must be, because, however sure it may be that they must be so soon deprived of these things, yet they do not think it sure ;—the hour of death, always

uncertain, may be distant, and because it *may* be distant, we take for granted it must be.

And then this world's comforts and advantages seem to be of real consequence—in themselves, I mean, and without reference to what shall be in another unseen state.

Thus do we deceive ourselves very much, the best and most religious among us—deceive ourselves (I will not say, to our own ruin, but at least) to our great hindrance and perplexity in following the path of sound practical holiness, the “narrow way which leadeth unto life.”

It would ill become an authorized minister of Christ's gospel, to deceive or flatter those whom he is appointed to instruct.

We may not venture to say, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace,” to soothe men's souls to sleep in the hour of danger, or to represent the condition of the Christian world more favorably than the truth will warrant on a calm and attentive observation of the state of things around us.

And I think it must be allowed by any impartial and fair-judging mind, that however well skilled people may be in scriptural and other knowledge, and ready to dispute and give a positive opinion on religion, or on any subject almost which may be started—yet that there is in fact very little disposition to serious thought, or to close and careful examination into the truth of things.

Especially, there seems reason for apprehending that people in general—we ourselves, whatever may be our knowledge or our professions—do not yet consider or wish to consider the great importance of all our behavior—of our right spending every hour as it passes by.

We no doubt content ourselves too much with general notions, intentions, and resolutions, and are less careful to apply these to each particular case as it comes in our way.

We do not indeed neglect our duty to God or man altogether, deliberately, wilfully, and professedly; but



we too easily content ourselves with a faint imperfect obedience.

How inconsistent this with the solemn warnings of divine truth.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, all thy soul, all thy mind, all thy strength.”

“Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily—as to the Lord and not to men.”

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.”

But the best of us surely will confess with tears of shame, that whatever their love for their God and Redeemer may have been, it has not been “with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength;”—that when they have endeavored to do right, it has too often not been “heartily” (as St. Paul says), but with too great a regard to men’s wishes, and too little to God’s: that in fact, they have by no means done their duty “with all their might,” but faintly, imperfectly, and indolently, as if they should have an opportunity for “work, and device, and knowledge, and wisdom in the grave—whither they are going.”

Now, let no one say or think that this is a slight evil, or that if our general course of conduct be what the world calls good and religious, that therefore we need not be so particular about our behavior hour after hour; about the government of our tempers on trying occasions, or about inquiring so very exactly into the measures of our duty toward God and one another.

No doubt we may be too scrupulous—not because we can possibly be too righteous, too religious (in the right sense of the word), but because our scruples may mislead us from the right path, the path of holy practice.

Nevertheless, there is certainly on the whole more danger of our having too little caution, than too much—more danger of our being too confident, than too distrustful of ourselves.

Hence there is, generally speaking, more need to warn Christians of these days to look closely into the truth of things, and to judge and try their ways very severely:—this is more necessary than it is to tell them that

they need not be so very scrupulous, or that they need not try to be more holy than they are at present, or that if they are no worse than they are now, it will do, or any such way of speaking, which really can be accounted nothing better than false, flattering, and delusive, and such as seems to show a great coldness and want of love toward our blessed Lord and Redeemer.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” Does not this plainly imply that we are expected to be very exact and particular about our behavior, hour after hour? in other words, that we are to be careful not merely to be doing right, but to be doing it with zeal, heartiness, and sincerity, and not as if we thought that God cared not how we served him.

We very often speak and think as if our time were our own: as if we had a right to spend it as we pleased—in fact, as if we had a right to waste it without being called to account for it.

Alas! who is there of us, whose heart must not plead guilty to this charge?

For let us remember that if any matter of duty could as well or better be done in a shorter time, and we loiter and linger about it, we are quite as chargeable with indolence and negligence as if we had actually done nothing for some portion of the time so misspent.

We very often appear to be busy when we are most idle—appear busy, I say, not to others only, but even to ourselves—so willing are we to flatter ourselves into fancied ease and self-approbation, so treacherous and deceitful is the human heart.

No doubt our all-merciful God, in this as in other respects, sees and compassionates our weakness: neither in this nor in other respects is he “extreme to mark what is done amiss—for if he were, who could abide it?” who could look back on any one single day of his whole life, and say with confidence that he had spent it hour after hour in such a way as that he could not have wished it better spent?

Blessed be God’s name, our hopes of mercy do not

rest on ourselves; we have nothing to plead in the way of excuse, much less of merit; our entire and only ground of confidence is in the one great atonement, the blood of the Lamb slain to take away the sins of the world. Except in that blood we have no confidence, no hope.

Still if we consider things aright, with that care and seriousness which the business of eternity may well demand, we must allow that the more kind, compassionate, and forbearing our gracious Lord is toward us, the more are we bound to study earnestly his blessed will, and never to think we can do enough to show our gratitude for all he has done for us.

And this must lead us to feel, that it does indeed deeply concern us to be very exact and particular about our daily and hourly conduct—and never to encourage in ourselves the notion—the false, dangerous, and delusive notion, that our time is our own, and that we have a right to spend it as we please.

Let us again consider, that the government of our tempers and dispositions is one of the greatest trials of our Christian sincerity. Here also the divine warning is truly touching, and of constant application, if we look home to ourselves and our course of conduct.

In the control and management of our tempers, I say, especially under trying circumstances, the sacred word is addressed to us. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do”—whatever possible means you can lay hold of to mortify all dispositions to pride, envy, malice, peevishness, and ill-temper—“do it with all thy might”—let no opportunity pass of furthering so valuable an end: “for there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest;” the present opportunity let slip can never return.

For instance, if we go on for some time without being angry or out of humor, we think of course we are good-tempered: whereas, perhaps, the real cause is, that it has so happened that nothing particular has come across us to vex or disturb us. At length some such thing occurs, and we think we have a right to be very angry

and out of humor. We do not blame ourselves for such ill-humor, but are rather pleased to think that it does not often happen, and that we submit to a great many things which others would highly resent, and so forth.

Now in this, as in other like cases, the truth seems to be—that our general disposition is shown by our conduct under such particular trials. For it is in fact only in the time of trial that the real temper and disposition of the heart can be ascertained. Hence it is so easy for us to deceive ourselves, and to fancy we have made greater advances in Christian perfection, than indeed we have.

Hence also the necessity of our maintaining a strict and close watch over ourselves—that so by the aid of God's Holy Spirit we may be ready against every trial—that “having taken unto us the whole armor of God, we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

But if we get into careless thoughtless ways, and fancy that it does not much signify what our tempers and dispositions are day after day, and hour after hour, then surely we forget what a warfare we are engaged in, what enemies we have to deal with, and how necessary it is, if we would “lay hold on eternal life,” that we should “fight the good fight of faith,” and labor and pray to be enabled to “bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

Another thing much to be observed and deplored is, that people should be so ready to think that there is no need for them to be so very particular and exact in ascertaining the measures of Christian truth, their duty to God and to one another.

Carelessness about religious truth is a sign of want of love for God. No person can be indifferent about such a subject without great danger surely.

To this also the heavenly warning seems to be especially applicable. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,” in proving and ascertaining the truth, “do it with thy might ;”—think no labor or cost too great by which

you may find out where the truth lies, and by what means you may be preserved in it steadfast to the end.

But now it is certainly the case, that a great number of people—and many even religiously disposed people—do not take much pains, perhaps none at all, about ascertaining the real nature of religious truth—but somehow take for granted that their own opinions are right—or at least that one opinion is as good as another, or very often go on through life wavering and doubtful, but yet without taking much if any pains to have their doubts cleared and explained.

I am not now speaking of one sect or party of Christians more than another: it may seem to be a generally prevailing practical error, both among the professed members of the church of England, and those who dissent from her—that whether the truth be here, or whether it be there, it signifies little, so that every man be allowed to have his own opinion and think as he please. Whatever may be the cause of such a prevailing state of opinion, the fact cannot be questioned, that it does prevail.

Nevertheless, that it is a practical error, and of a most serious kind, may appear from a few considerations which I shall offer.

If the great God in his infinite love to us has condescended to make known to us the mysteries of his gospel, can we venture to receive them with carelessness and indifference? And is it not receiving them with carelessness and indifference to say, “whether we understand them aright or no, we are not sure; but however, we do not see that we need inquire or search much about the matter?”

For what purpose, it may be asked, has the divine gift of reason been vouchsafed to us, but that we may employ it in the noblest of all occupations—the search and inquiry after God’s eternal truth—the truth as it is in Jesus?

The volume of Scripture is not a small one: there are in it numberless things hard to be understood—many, very many, which require great patience and attention,

and an earnest desire after right instruction, if any one think to obtain at all a satisfactory notion of their meaning.

Can we then venture to say of any passage in Scripture, that it may mean this, or it may mean that, but it does not much signify which ?

Or rather, is not the sacred rule, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might"—is not this particularly applicable to the duty incumbent on us, as reasonable beings, and much more as professed Christians, to make the study of the Bible the business, as it should be the delight, of our lives ?

No doubt the obscurities and difficulties with which that sacred book is in a manner filled, are not there accidentally ; no doubt they are intended by its All-wise Author to be the means of trying our humility, our teachableness, our diligence—whether we do really love him, and desire to know and do his pleasure, according to what we profess.

For let us ask ourselves, can we really love our God, if we do not desire to know and do his pleasure ? And can we desire to know and do his pleasure, if we do not anxiously labor and endeavor by all possible means to ascertain the right and true meaning of his own revealed Word, the volume of Holy Scripture ?

Alas ! what a treasure do we possess, and how little do we value it—the best and wisest among us !

For the present, then, I must say nothing more than that the danger we are in of neglecting our Christian duty is certainly great and pressing—the danger, I mean, of neglecting the time present, and doing the work of the Lord in a heartless, careless manner.

How to guard against this danger is a consideration of as great importance as any that can be well thought of—but we must put it off to some future opportunity.

However, let us all remember—let us labor and pray to have the great truth deeply impressed on our hearts—that we have no time to waste—that "whatever our hand findeth to do, we must do it with our might ;" ever remembering, that every hour is an hour of trial to

us; and that whether we spend it well or ill, it is gone for ever—we can never spend it over again.

And yet this is what we cannot, will not be persuaded of. We have a sort of notion, that if we were diligent at one time, we have a right to be idle at another; or that if we are negligent in some respects, we may make up for it by greater zeal in others.

This is so dangerous a notion, that I am sure, I am positive, we cannot too much guard against it.

And may our merciful heavenly Father, in his infinite love to us, grant us the aid of his Holy Spirit, to comfort our sinking hearts, and strengthen our failing faltering steps: may he, for his dear Son's sake, enable us, day after day, and hour after hour, to make some progress at least, however slight, in the knowledge of his truth, and the practice of his will: that so we may still be drawing nearer and nearer unto him—still be growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## SERMON VIII.

## VALUE OF TIME.

ECCLES. ix. 10.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,  
Do it with thy might ;  
For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom,  
In the grave, whither thou goest.”

IN directing your attention to this passage on a former occasion, I offered some observations on the danger we are in of not endeavoring to make the most of the time present, day after day.

How we may best guard against this danger is evidently a matter of the most serious consideration, and what I now wish to turn your thoughts to.

First of all, it is what no one I suppose can deny—no one, at least, whose understanding is not clouded by habitual indolence, or violent prejudices—that it is the duty of each of us to put our minds to this matter ; to consider closely and attentively each for himself, what it is for such as we to be wasteful of our time and talents, not to endeavor to make the most of them day after day, as long as we stay here.

This can scarcely be denied by any reasonable person. And yet it is but too certain that a great many people, some from one cause, and some from another, go on all their lives through, without so much as ever once—no, not even once, considering with any earnestness, whether their course of practice is really what it ought to be, whether they are making the most of their time, understanding, and other advantages, which the providence of God has placed at their disposal.

We take for granted we are right, or at least not very wrong, in our opinions and practices ; and if we



can but keep our feelings calm and comfortable, we are satisfied.

Now I know this is very natural, and quite what was to be expected from frail and fallen creatures such as we are.

But then we must take care how we trust too much to our nature in its present state, degenerate and corrupt.

And we must ever remember that the very purpose and meaning of the gospel revelation is to correct and restore this our fallen nature; in other words, really to prevent us from being guided or governed by our feelings, and to keep us ever under the control of sound wisdom, judgment, and discretion.

Nevertheless we too often forget this, the best of us; so reluctant and unwilling are we to take the trouble of entering on close attention and deep serious thought, though all the while perhaps we have a strong sort of instinctive sense of the awfulness of our condition—a great change coming on each of us—but how near to each of us, no one can tell.

It would be well then if we could be prevailed on even for once in our lives—only once—to press very closely on our thoughts the consideration of what the value of our time really is—for what purposes we are placed here—what the end is likely to be of our present goings on—whether we are really making the most, or at least sincerely endeavoring to make the most, of our time, and other various talents and faculties which our God has bestowed on us—each of us severally.

If we would but for once consider these things very closely, and with serious attention of mind, not giving way to our feelings or prejudices, nor taking for granted that our present way of going on is safe and right—if we would but for once so far humble ourselves, as really, and not in words only, to doubt whether or not we are neglecting, day after day, in many respects, the gracious opportunities which our merciful God puts within our reach—if we would only once, just once, condescend to take the trouble thus to examine into

the truth of our condition—not what we have fancied it to be, but what it is—then there would be hope, by the divine assistance, that we might see and know, before it be too late, “the things which belong unto our” eternal “peace.”

But if we have no doubts and fears for ourselves, surely some way or other our judgment must be blinded or misled.

I say then, it would be something, if Christians could be so far prevailed on, as just for once to give an hour or two's close thought and attention to their own course of life, to the way in which they are going on—whether they are really, and in their every-day practice, trying to make the most of whatever talents are entrusted to them.

For if they would think thus seriously and closely *once*, then there is reason to hope that the view they might then have of their condition, so vast an eternity spread before them, and their lot *in* that eternity made to depend on the few uncertain days we have to stay here; and our goings on, at the very best, so mean, so unworthy, and full of faults; such a view as this of what our condition really is, might (one would hope) lead us on to a constant daily habit of watching ourselves very suspiciously, lest we should allow ourselves in the evil custom of wasting our Master's time, or other the talents which he has given us to make the most of.

I say, our Master's time, our Master's talents; for, whatever we may fancy, we certainly have none of our own.

We have no liberty to spend anything, but entirely and only to his honor, and in his service. Our own will and pleasure, our fancies and imaginations, these we cannot listen to.

As Christians, we can have no will but that of our Master, Christ Jesus. Our own inclinations cannot be trusted to. Be they right or wrong, they cannot, I say, be trusted to as guides. The will of his Savior is the Christian's only guide.

And this is the very consideration which makes it at the same time so necessary, and yet so difficult, even for the best-intentioned persons, to get into a resolute settled habit of watching their own ways closely and suspiciously. I say, because our own inclinations cannot be trusted to in any case, but we must be guided entirely by other rules. And yet our inclinations, by which I mean our natural feelings and affections, are of all things most powerful to influence us, not only now and then upon particular occasions, but in the whole course of this our earthly probation, hour after hour. Hence, as the Scripture assures us, a constant warfare or struggle must be carried on in the Christian's heart : a warfare and a struggle from which he has no promise of being free on this side the grave.

Indeed some good persons have represented the matter otherwise, as if the sincere Christian might have a right to expect to be freed from this anxious doubtful state, when once he had resigned up his heart fully and entirely to the love of his Savior.

But if people, instead of looking to single passages of Scripture here and there, would consider its general meaning and intention, they must, I think, allow that we are not taught to expect anything like perfect rest and peace here, no, not even those who have made the greatest progress in evangelical holiness.

And if this be the case, then it must be always necessary for us to be keeping daily and hourly watch over ourselves ; to be very suspicious of our own hearts, and of the motives by which we are actuated ; never to think we are safe, or secure of salvation, or to imagine that we have time or anything else which we can call our own, or which we have a right to dispose of in any way than to the honor of our adorable Lord and Redeemer.

This might perhaps not be the case, if we could arrive at a positive certainty and assurance of salvation. But as the Scripture does not encourage us to trust to any such confident feelings, no, not even if we made the greatest progress toward Christian perfec-

tion; therefore I conclude that at the best and happiest we must "pass the time of our sojourning here in fear;" that "whatever our hand findeth to do, we must do it with our might," while our day of probation lasts, ever remembering that "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither we are going," hastening so very fast!

Let me farther entreat you to observe, that if we would really make the most of our time as Christians; if we would serve our heavenly Master sincerely, and, as the text says, "with our might;" it is necessary that we should be still raising our hearts to him in devout aspirations that he would bless every work of our hands; that he would "prevent us in all our doings with his most gracious favor, and further us with his continual help; that so all our works being begun, continued, and ended in him, we may, through Christ Jesus, glorify his holy name."

Let me, I say, entreat you to observe, that thus to live habitually in the practice of secret prayer is not merely expedient, but absolutely necessary for all who wish to make the most of the time present: or rather, I should say, for all who would not run into the dreadful danger of misspending and throwing away their time, talents, and various opportunities of improvement which our gracious God puts within our reach hour after hour during the course of this our earthly pilgrimage.

We may make the best resolutions, but if we think to fulfil them by our own strength, and slight him on whom all our dependance must be, what can we expect but failure and disappointment?

Owing to our forgetfulness of this, we too often grow disheartened in our Christian course; and though perhaps we have made a good beginning, yet fall off again, having trusted too much to the broken reed of our own unassisted strength.

Hence it is absolutely necessary, if we would indeed make the most of this our time of trial, and serve our heavenly Master acceptably;—it is necessary, I say,

that we "pray," as the apostle says, "without ceasing," that is, that we use ourselves constantly and hourly to raise our thoughts to him whose eye is ever upon us, and beg of him, for the sake of his beloved Son, to support us in every trial, and to guide us in every difficulty. And surely our lives at the best can be called nothing else than a succession of trials and difficulties day after day.

Without heavenly support, then, and heavenly guidance, how dangerous must be our condition! and what hope can we have that such aid will be granted to us, if we think it not worth earnestly and constantly seeking for?

Another thing which seems very much to be attended to by all who sincerely desire "so to pass through things temporal, as finally to lose not the things eternal," is this: that when we see plainly what our duty is in any respect, we must not allow ourselves to put it off to a future time. No rule can be plainer than this, and yet, alas! how do the best, the most sincere and diligent among us, neglect it—this plain rule how do the best of us neglect every day of our lives!

We think, perhaps, that what many good people do, there can be no great harm in, no great danger.

Rather let us think of what little value the example even of the best of men is, unless it be founded on the word and will of God—on "the proportion of the faith,"—the strict and sacred rules of the gospel of Christ.

Let us also think that the faults and errors, of the best of men are still faults and errors, and as such are surely to be avoided. A wrong thing does not become right because a good person practises it.

This is a plain truth, which ought to be much more regarded than it is; as in other respects, so also in regard of the obligation which is laid upon us to make the most of present opportunities, and not to put off to an uncertain future what we have reason to think our heavenly master would wish us to do or to be.

The case seems to stand thus. If we *can* be better employed than in accomplishing the will of our blessed

Lord and Savior, then surely we *should* be so employed. Then it would be *right*—our *duty*, to attend to other things first, and to him at some future time; days, months, or years hence.

But I beg and entreat you to consider—is not Jesus Christ our one only hope? Or is this a vain enthusiastic fancy—a mere way of speaking, words without meaning?

But now, if Jesus Christ is indeed our only hope, then what else can we have to do, now or at any time, except to serve him? How can it be reasonable or safe for us sometimes to serve him and sometimes not—now to love him and now to forget him, now to serve him diligently and now carelessly and slothfully? Or rather, is it not a rule for our daily observance, throughout, to the very hour of our death—“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do” in accomplishing the will of your Savior, “do it with thy might,” still remembering that the time of trial and discipline will soon be over—that “there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave—whither thou goest?”

Whoever considers this seriously, and with a Christian spirit, cannot but feel very deeply the necessity which is laid upon us, to do what we have to do without delay—not to put off what is right and good to the chance of the future (for it is but a chance), nor to venture to consider any time beyond the present day as what we can call our own.

Another consideration of great value to keep us earnest and zealous in making the most of the time present is this, that certainly our mighty God and Savior is not to be trifled with. Alas! my brethren, what can we say for ourselves when we think of this!

The great God is not to be trifled with—and yet how have we been going on, I say, the best of us?

How little of our time do we consecrate to his service? Of that little, how much is wasted and frittered away, in vain, distracting, worldly thoughts—or in cherishing rash presumptuous confidences—or, at the best,

with very faint unworthy impressions of *his* majesty, whom we profess to adore!

By reflections of this sort, we should humble our pride and self-confidence; and labor and pray unceasingly after real seriousness and sincerity of heart, no longer daring to be careless and trifling, being as we are on the very edge of a vast boundless eternity, into which we must be soon all swept away—though *how* soon, we know not.

In our whole conduct, indeed, we should carefully avoid trifling thoughtless ways, which we are too apt to run into almost without being aware. But especially in matters of religious truth and practice, we should be particularly on our guard against all trifling: not only because we are particularly in danger of erring in this respect, but also because such conduct seems to show a great want of love for our blessed Lord and Redeemer.

I leave you to consider, whether practices which are common enough among Christians; such, for instance, as saying prayers for form's sake, without thinking of the meaning—spending the Lord's day in idleness or worse—wandering about from one place of worship to another, for the sake of sermons, or singing, or any such reason—talking on scriptural or religious subjects in a light careless way—irreverent behavior in the Lord's house—turning one's back on the Lord's table, under pretence of not being fit, or because there is no need to go so often—or still more, attending on that sacred ordinance without earnest resolutions to devote ourselves more than ever to the service of our Redeemer—I say, I solemnly call on you to consider seriously whether practices such as these, common as they may be among Christians, are not in fact proofs how men can dare to trifle with their God, how they can set their consciences at ease without sufficient grounds, nor can be persuaded even to inquire, whether they may not possibly be in error.

I say not this, God is my witness, with any the least unkind feeling, but with sorrow and fear: sorrow, that we should dare to trifle on such awful subjects—and

fear, for what the consequences may be, when we shall be summoned before the great tribunal, to give account of the talents with which we have been severally entrusted.

“There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave—whither thou goest.”

All that *can* be done, *must* be done now, in this brief, transitory, uncertain space. We cannot live over another life to make amends for our errors in this.

If we make mistakes in our religious opinions, and do not try to ascertain the truth—we may not indeed be punished for our errors: but what excuse can we make for not trying to ascertain the truth?—the truth, I mean, of our duty, how we should act.

People should consider this, who talk in such a loose careless way, and say it does not signify what a man's opinions are, if his practice is but good.

Perhaps in the eyes of men it does not signify; but how can we love God if we are not anxious to think of him aright, to come to the knowledge of his truth? And if the sincere love of Christ Jesus be not the ruling principle of our conduct—or at least if we are not laboring unceasingly more and more that it should be so, then indeed we have reason to fear that we are in a wrong course.

These things let us turn our thoughts to, closely and seriously.

Let us think little of parting with present comfort, of subjecting ourselves to doubts, perplexities, and the scorn of the world, if we may but arrive at the knowledge of the truth—“the truth as it is in Jesus.”

Let us still remember that every man must look to himself, that we have no time to lose. Eternity is close at hand, and how are we prepared for it?

Let us beware of trusting much to good feelings, professions, or intentions; but “whatever our hand findeth to do” in the way of duty, let us “do it with our might.”

For thus only can we prove ourselves sincere in the love and service of our Redeemer. Thus, and thus



only, can we draw near to the awful hour of death, and the more awful day of judgment, with humble confidence in his blood, trusting to be received to his eternal joy.

Surely such trust, so placed, shall not be in vain.

Nevertheless, "Be not high-minded, but fear."

## SERMON IX.

## OUR LORD A PATTERN OF PRIVATE PRAYER.

MATT. vi. 6.

“ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

WHAT can be more simple and easy to be understood, than the picture which these words present to us? A devout worshipper, with his door closed, the world shut out, and he alone with his God, pouring out his heart earnestly in the confession of his sin and infirmity, in prayers for pardon and grace, in thanksgivings for mercies received, and in intercession for all whom he loves. Every one perceives at once, that this sort of communication with the Almighty, regularly kept up, is the best way to exercise himself in devotional feelings. Accordingly, even among heathens and misbelievers, as many as have not given up all notions of God altogether, have used and recommended prayer at set times, as the best way of securing help from above, and of keeping up something like religion in the minds of men.

But no false religion, nor any wisdom merely human, could ever add with authority and power such a promise as this of our Savior in the text. They might say, pray so many times a year, or a day; use such and such helps to seriousness and devotion: but they could not with authority follow up their good advice by saying, Thy Father which seeth in secret, the same shall reward thee openly. He who came from heaven, and is above all—the very God who hears prayer, and the Savior for whose sake it is heard—he assures us that it is acceptable to his Father and himself. It is not only edifying to us,

but it is the way to get a blessing from him. This, man never could have known, except God himself had revealed it to him. And to have the revelation confirmed so expressly by no less a person than his own incarnate Son, is the strongest mark of its great importance to us, and how much concerned our heavenly Father is, that we might know quite thoroughly the value he sets on our prayers.

This appears yet more, when we come to consider our Lord's own practice, the best interpreter of his precepts. One might have supposed that he, the very Word incarnate and wisdom of the Father, in whom dwelt the Spirit without measure, and to whom all things were committed of God—one might have supposed that he would not have needed the practice of prayer like other men. But it is plain that prayer was, humanly speaking, the very life and comfort of our blessed Savior's soul. He hastened as it were back to prayer, for a refuge from all the cares and sorrows which beset him in his painful and laborious life. Was he wearied out with teaching and with working miracles? His refreshment was, to withdraw himself and pray. Was he preparing for any great work? He continued the night before in prayer to God. Did any sorrow press heavily on him? He prayed more and more earnestly, till an angel came from heaven to strengthen him. In short, no one ever prayed so constantly as he of whom one might beforehand have imagined that he stood in no need of prayer.

Now observe what follows from this. We know that Jesus Christ our Savior is the only pure example the world ever saw of that temper and frame of mind which the children of Adam must learn to practise before they can be happy in heaven. The mind of Christ is the mind of heaven: and none ever prayed like Christ. Does not this show most clearly, that he who would be ever fit for heaven, must begin by learning to delight in his prayers? Ought it not with reason to alarm those to whom prayer is a burden and a weariness? It is not only that they lose the blessing they ask—that God will not hear them for that time: their loss is far greater

than that: they are living, and are like to die, without any practice of that temper which must be practised if they would be happy in heaven. Every hour that you go on in that mind takes you farther from the resemblance of your Savior. Can you think of this, and not wish, and pray, and desire that God would give you a better mind?

But our Lord's example teaches us another thing besides the *great necessity of prayer*; and that is, the *best way of praying*, so that one's prayers may be sure to be heard. If we knew it no other way, we might be sure from our blessed Lord's pattern, that God is never so well pleased with us, as when we approach him with the deepest *reverence* of heart.

He, then, who was infinitely nearer the Father than any other of the children of men ever was or can be; the man who was in his own person the very Son of God incarnate: he who alone had no sin to make him unworthy of approaching his Father's throne: he of all others set us the pattern of deepest reverence and humiliation of body and mind in our addresses to the Majesty of heaven. This, we may reasonably believe, was one reason of his withdrawing himself, as we read that he did repeatedly, to places where he might be least interrupted and where he might unreservedly pour out his divine soul. This made him fall down in so lowly postures, sometimes kneeling, sometimes lying prostrate. This breathed over all his prayers, of which there are several in the gospels, that unspeakable mixture of majesty and humility, which no words can describe, but of which surely one effect ought to be, to make every Christian man very fearful lest he be found drawing near the high and holy One with any other than the most serious words and thoughts.

Now one part of this reverence will be, that men will pray to God *regularly*; not at random, and as it may happen, now performing and now omitting their devotions, just as they chance to be minded for the time. Do you not plainly see, first of all, that such irregular unpunctual prayer is very likely indeed to dwindle into

no prayer at all ; just as everything else which is done irregularly is sure to be often left undone. And in the next place, which is more respectful to the great king of heaven and earth ? to wait till you are at leisure, or so disposed, before you draw near to offer him your acknowledgments ; or to humble yourself before him at set hours, making time when you seem to have none, and forcing yourself to perform that solemn service in spite of all distractions whatever ? Common sense will tell you at once which of these two is the more devotional way, quite as plainly as if one had asked, whether a parent or benefactor is more honored by our visiting him or otherwise remembering him now and then, or by our coming regularly so often, and putting other engagements by to wait upon him. We may therefore rest assured, that our Lord approved and himself practised the custom of private prayer morning and evening, which natural piety teaches us all ; though neither in his discourses, nor in any other part of the Bible, that I remember, are people expressly enjoined to practise it. Our heavenly Father has left this, as he has so many other things, for a trial of our dutiful affection toward him. But wo to that unthankful child, who, because he finds no express command, encourages himself in the liberty of omitting either his morning or his evening addresses to the Author of his being.

Perhaps you will say, “ nay, but it is better not to pray at all, than to pray formally ;” that one prayer with the spirit is worth ten with the lips only ; and, therefore, that it is best not to tie yourself to times and forms, but to pray in this or that place, as God shall move your heart, in season or out of season. But by thus talking, you show plainly that you know very little of religion ; very little of the true fear of God. For if you were really practised in that, you would know that it is like other right dispositions, other good tempers of mind and heart : it will not take root nor thrive in us without continual practice and effort, and earnest wishing and striving on our parts. Suppose an undutiful child were to say, “ It is no use, my coming and waiting on my

father ; I have tried it once or twice, and I took no pleasure in it ; it was a mere wearisome burden to me. I will just let it all alone, and not come near my father, nor do anything at all for him, till I feel inclined to do it cheerfully : and this will be much better, surely, than the hypocrisy of waiting on him with a grudging mind, and wishing myself elsewhere all the while." What, I ask, would any one think, who should hear an undutiful son or daughter reasoning thus in justification of such unnatural behavior ? Would not people say, "If the man were in earnest, of course he would not mind waiting on his parent, however at first it might put him out of his way ?" Would they not advise him, at all events, to do what he could for his father and his mother, assuring him that by degrees what was irksome to him at first would become easy and natural ; and that by constant dutiful *behavior* to his parents he would somehow or other find that his *mind* and *temper* would become dutiful ?

Why have I put this case about undutiful children and their conduct to their parents ? Because it seems to me, and I think it must seem to you, very like the undutifulness of too many Christians toward God. The same sort of behavior, then, which would cure the one, would cure the other. If the unnatural child would learn to be dutiful, he must begin by "*showing* piety at home, and requiting his parents" by kind words, looks, and deeds. If the unchristian heart wants to be touched, and to learn the true love of God in Christ Jesus, that man also must begin by often *performing* acts of devotion. He must not forsake the church, nor refuse to join in prayer at home, nor leave off kneeling down solemnly in private prayer morning and evening, because he has tried these things often, and they have passed over him as mere forms, and he has seemed to himself never the devouter for them. To do so would be as if the son should leave off waiting on his father, because he found at first that he did it rather grudgingly. If that would be the wrong way to improve in nat-

ural affection, be sure the other would be the wrong way to improve in piety and devotion.

Indeed, the case is so plain; that one is almost ashamed of spending so many words upon it; and I suppose most people see it at once, when the question is about morning and evening prayers at home. But in public prayers, I know not how it is, it should seem that we are apt to take a different measure from what we do in respect of private devotions. Thus you shall often hear people saying they abstain from coming to church on week-days, or as often as they might on Sundays, and especially they refrain from often communicating, because they are afraid of their service becoming formal. I shall say no more of this at present, than that it seems to me they might just as reasonably leave out their morning or evening prayers, any time that they felt indisposed toward them.

Next to regularity in *times* of prayer, a wise choice of a *place* to pray in is of no small consequence, where people have a choice. We are all so far like children, that we are creatures of custom and habit; and it comes to be very much of a help to us, when we would establish ourselves in a way of praying attentively, to have some one particular room, or part of a room, which is as it were hallowed to us by our often using it to that purpose; to have some place where, when we kneel to-morrow, the very place itself may recall to us the good thoughts and purposes we had, when we were there praying to-day; and how we have kept them, or swerved from them. For this sort of reason, most serious worshippers like to have a particular place in the church, and find it a help to their devotions; a feeling which of course grows on them as they become older, and gather in every year a fresh set of holy recollections, to add to their store of reasons for liking that place.

This kind of devout precaution our Lord does not indeed command, but he rather encourages it by his injunction, "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet," that is, have a set place for prayer. And his example speaks very strongly to the same effect. For although

in the wandering life he passed, not having where to lay his head, no regular home of his own, it must have been often out of the question for him to have any regular place of devotion, to which he might return day after day; yet this we see, that more than once he chose out this or that place, evidently as most apt and proper for his holy intercourse with his Father. Thus, very early in his ministry, when first his miracles began to be attended to, "In the morning," says St. Mark, "rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a desert place, and there prayed." On which words a holy bishop asks, "What is a slothful sinner to think of himself," when he reads of such devotion on the part of the holy Jesus? What indeed are we all to think of our slovenly, and hurried, and unworthy prayers, when we see him, who could not pray amiss, taking so much trouble to pray in the very best way possible: using the silence of the early morning, and the most solitary place he could find? no doubt for this among other purposes:—to reprove us for our too little care, too little study how to pray best; and on the other hand, to encourage those saints of his, who in better ages of the church have loved to watch with him early and late, and to steal from sleep, as they conveniently might, minutes or hours which they might spend in devotion.

Again we read that before he named the apostles, and delivered to them his holy sermon on the Mount, he continued on the same mountain all night in prayer to God.

Thirdly, after one of his greatest miracles, the feeding five thousand with a few loaves and fishes, when he was on the point of delivering that doctrine of communion with him, which was to be the great trial of faith and unbelief;—then also he sent away both the multitude and his disciples, and spent three parts of the night (it was a night of tempest) alone praying on the mountain; for it seems to have been the same.

And when he was to be transfigured, then also he took his three favored disciples apart into the mountain



(probably still the same mountain) to pray: and those prayers likewise seem to have continued very late in the night.

Finally, during the last week, the very week of his suffering for us, thus he prepared himself for his sufferings. "In the daytime he was teaching in the temple, and in the evening he went out to the mount called the Mount of Olives;" no doubt to the holy garden, where he was taken just after his agony, the last night before he was crucified. There, too, as it may seem, he had a set place of prayer; a place remote from the tumult of the city: a garden, where he might pray by moonlight, interrupted by nothing but his affectionate pastoral care for his yet imperfect and slumbering disciples.

To the very last, then, it was our Lord's custom to prepare himself for great changes and trials by very solemn exercises of devotion: and to make the devotion more solemn, he chose out especial places for it; places the most apt, from their loneliness, for such holy and awful communications.

As regards us, there was another reason probably, why he so carefully withdrew himself to pray: viz., to set an example of that secrecy which he so seriously commands us to practise, here in the text. "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may have glory of men. . . . But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Our Savior knew the corrupt hearts of men, knew how surely they would begin to value themselves, and to seek praise from others, under pretence of doing more good, for prayers as they deemed rightly offered up: and therefore he takes away at once all excuse for that kind of vanity, by charging us, to the best of our power, to keep our private prayers secret. So that no one, who minds what our Lord says, can imagine it his duty to make a

show of his devotion, with the notion of profiting others by his example. For if our vanity were necessary to another's edification, our Lord, who surely knows best, would not have so peremptorily forbidden it.

Let us then remember, and never forget, with what especial care and jealousy the Lord and Redeemer of our souls and bodies watches over us night and morning in this great concern of our private devotions. He is very anxious indeed, that in a matter so immediately between God and us, nothing unworthy, vain, or impure, may by any means intrude; that our prayer may be such as he may offer, in virtue of his all-sufficient merits, like incense before his Father's throne. Will you not watch with him one hour? Will you not labor, that this night at least the great Intercessor may present to his Father from you a real prayer, a prayer offered with meek heart and due reverence? You know not how much good one such earnest supplication may do you. If by God's grace you begin this night to say your prayers more devoutly than before, he may help you to say them still better to-morrow. Devout prayer, steadily persisted in, will lead to devout and holy obedience: and holy obedience, for Christ's sake, cannot lead to less than eternal glory.

## SERMON X.

## MORAL BENEFITS OF PRIVATE PRAYER.

MATT. vi. 6.

“ Pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

OUR Lord and Savior Jesus Christ being set forth as the pattern of private prayer, we have seen that his example encourages us to pray constantly, and not to faint ; it shows us that when we have no heart, no liking, for our prayers, it is no small fault we commit, but we show ourselves wanting in that mind and temper without which we cannot be happy, no, not in heaven itself.

Again, the example of our Savior teaches us to use sound wisdom and discretion in our choice of a *place* to pray in ; endeavoring to be, as near as we can, alone with God in our private prayers to him ; availing ourselves of darkness, silence, solitude, leisure, and whatever helps to remove the world from our sight, and leave us to meditate, undisturbed, on blessings which the world cannot give, and terrors from which it cannot protect. Especially we have our Lord's authority for setting apart, if we can, some room, or part of a room, or wherever else we can find a proper place, for praying to our Father which is in secret, every night and morning of our lives. We cannot do too much to make ourselves very serious and reverent, when we draw near to speak to our God on the most awful of all matters.

Such are some of the general instructions which we may glean from our Lord's own divine example in this matter of private prayer. In the text, as you see, he lays great stress on the one point of secrecy, as opposed

to the custom of the hypocritical Pharisees. They loved, and used themselves, to pray, that is, to say their private prayers, standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen of men. It was the way of their party, and they got influence by it. For among the Jews then, as among us now, and as, I suppose, at all times of the world, there were some Pharisees and some Sadducees—some, that is, who made a great show of religion for certain purposes of their own; others, who took a kind of pride in showing how little they cared for any kind of religion. Both parties were large and flourishing: and both, as it should seem, one as much as the other, set themselves against the very truth—the gospel of our Lord and Savior; and it was set against them. But against the Sadducees' error about prayer, there was little need to warn our Lord's disciples: they did not want to be told that men cannot live happy without prayer, that is, without God in the world; therefore, although there are many commandments *how* they should pray, and with what mind, I do not remember that in any place our Lord expressly enjoined them to pray night and morning. He takes *that* for granted, as I said before; whereas against the other sort of error—Pharisaical hypocrisy in prayer, the gospel is full of most serious warnings.

It seems, indeed, a strange thing that any set of persons should ever have thought of making their *private* prayers in public; but if we think it well over, it will be found to agree but too perfectly with the profane irreligious temper of fallen man, when God leaves him to himself. For let us suppose that these Pharisees, having been brought up in some sense of religion, could not make up their minds to leave off prayer altogether, yet unhappily, not choosing to live in the practice of faith and piety, had never learned to delight in prayer. What would be the consequence? Their devotions, morning and evening, would come upon them as a mere task and burden: not at all as a blessing, nor as a privilege. This would be intolerable, going on long,

twice at least every day of their lives. They will therefore in the end either neglect the form itself, giving themselves up to open and downright profaneness, or the evil spirit will help them to some way of reconciling it with their sins: which latter is at once done—men's prayers are made to be compatible with their wicked lives, when, being offered in public, they may be offered for decency's or credit's sake, that is, for a mere worldly motive. Thus the long prayers of those Pharisees, which would have been intolerable to them if offered in private, were borne with when they made them publicly for a show, because they brought their reward—the praise of men. And thus, without seeming to themselves to give up God's service entirely, the Pharisees contrived to live without God in the world.

Too many Christians contrive the same; not, indeed, in the same way, by saying their private prayers in public, but by hurrying them over always, omitting them often, and comforting themselves with the notion that they do a great deal for God, if they only attend the service of the church with tolerable regularity, when they fancy themselves at leisure. May we not say of such devotion, as our Lord said of the hypocrites who prayed in the synagogues and corners of the streets? "Verily, they have their reward" already, they have it all out in this world, and must not expect any in the world to come. They have it in this world, in the praise and approbation of men; in not losing the favor or good opinion of this or that friend or neighbor, which they would forfeit if they showed themselves altogether godless and profane. Or they have it in the false peace of their own consciences, which they manage to keep quiet by this vain shadow of religion. They must not expect the true peace of God, who deal with him and with themselves so deceitfully: but they may have a kind of peace—the peace of a slumbering and silent conscience, to the very end of their portion in this life; and so much the worse for them.

Now this wretched self-deceit is very hard indeed, if not impossible, to be reconciled with constant, attentive,

private prayer: *constant*, I say, and *attentive*; for no doubt men do greatly help themselves toward going on easily in their sins, by praying irregularly, now and then, or praying regularly, but inattentively, and then fancying they cannot be so very bad. But to pray night and morning *quite privately*, and attend to the meaning of their prayers, is such a practice as can hardly agree with any profane unchristian way of life.

Men think it a very simple and easy duty to bow their knees, and say their prayers. But take our Lord's words in the text, and consider how much, according to them, prayer really offered in secret must mean.

"Pray," says our Savior, "to thy Father which is in secret." This seems to refer to a name which is given to God in the prophecy of Isaiah. "Verily thou art a God that *hideth thyself*, O God of Israel, the Savior." God "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto."—"No man hath seen, nor can see him." To hold any communication with him is a work of very great faith. Before you can in earnest think a thought of God, or speak a sincere word to him, your hearts must be lifted up to a height far above whatever you see and know. You must have, strong and present in your mind, the idea of one infinitely powerful, wise, and good, at all moments quite close to you; holding you and yours, as it were, now and ever in his hand. You must consider yourself, a poor sinful worm of the earth, as entering into direct communication with the highest and most retired heaven; as speaking words that will be heard beyond the thrones of the most glorious angels; as thinking thoughts which the most holy trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are attending to, and watching, and ready to cherish, if there be but a spark of Christian sincerity in them. Now he who is in this frame of mind—he who seriously and sincerely thinks of God when he prays—must, for the time at least, lift up his soul far above all earthly things. And doing this, he must be deeply interested by the high thoughts which come over his soul. He *must* perceive and feel, for the time, that nothing is truly great but what is immortal;

no being worth living and dying for but he of whom and by whom are all things. Thus, if you pray to God thoughtfully, you must pray with deep and awful reverence. You must feel the distance between yourself and him to whom you are venturing to speak. And doing so regularly, as often as you prayed, and praying at least twice a day, you would form by degrees a *habit* of fearing God. Spiritual wisdom would begin in you, and by the unfailing grace of the Holy Ghost, the good beginning would ripen to a glorious consummation.

But now, if any congregation of Christians were asked one by one, and would answer truly and unreservedly, must not many plainly confess, that although perhaps they have said some prayers not irregularly for very many years, yet they have never, or very seldom, had any such deep and awakening thoughts of God? They have been ready enough, indeed, to use God's name, especially when anything happened to disturb or alarm them; but what if the most holy name have passed over their lips oftener as a word of course than in any other way? What if others, who have been taught, and have sometimes tried, to be more in earnest, must nevertheless own with shame and sorrow, that they have prayed thousands of times without any serious effort to compose and settle their minds into something like a true notion of the high and lofty one to whom they were speaking? If these things be so, there can be no wonder at the decay of true religion in the world, for all our high and loud professions. But will it not be a great wonder in the other world, if such careless unthinking worshippers obtain any blessing from the God whom they have so slighted? Can we be too speedy, or too earnest, in repenting of such prayers as these, and in learning, by God's grace, to pray more thoughtfully?

But farther; to any considerate person the thought is indeed inexpressibly awful, that, when he prays, he is speaking to "the Father which is in secret:" it is made, however, still more awful by reflecting on what our Lord next adds: "Thy Father which *seeth in secret* shall re-

ward thee openly." It is fearful, the addressing ourselves to one so high above us—to the Father which *is* in secret; but it is rendered yet more fearful by the consciousness that he *seeth* in secret. Although he dwell so high in heaven, yet he continually "humbleth himself to behold" the things that are in this lower earth. Therefore no devout worshipper need fear that any one of his hearty prayers will be lost. Even if he cannot pray in words, God knows the meaning of his heart, and has ways of setting all down. On the other hand, let no man think that this wilful misbehavior in prayer—hurrying it over, impatiently shortening it, using negligent or irreverent postures, neglecting to compose himself beforehand even by one serious thought, hastening eagerly away from it as one glad to get back to the world:—I say, let no Christian imagine that any of these faults, or the like, is too trifling to be noticed by the Judge of all the earth. What if there were any of them light faults in themselves? yet, as tokens and samples of what men have in their hearts, they are fearfully bad and severely punishable. Indeed misbehavior in private prayer is especially foolish as well as wicked, because, of all religious duties, private prayer is that one which most immediately regards the Almighty as *really present*, and *watching* what we do. If a man behave ill in *public* prayer, he may defend himself, profanely indeed, but consistently enough, by saying he does not believe, nor care for God at all, only he comes to church to serve this or that temporal purpose; but no person using private prayer can consistently say he does not believe at all. For if he do not believe, why does he pray? He can get nothing at all by his prayer in the way of temporal good, it being (as we suppose) entirely and strictly private. Therefore, if he prays in private, he surely believes. But if he believe—if he really acknowledge the unseen all-seeing God—how can he behave himself rudely or irreverently toward him? By praying, you own him infinitely near; by praying carelessly, you do in effect deny that he is near or attending to you at all. Such is the perverse wretchedness of our nature, if not



helped and guided by true Christian religion, under the influence of God's most Holy Spirit. A person who, being alone, prays carelessly, cannot plead, with the patriarch Jacob, "the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." For by the very act of praying at all, he confesses that "God is in this place."

Whoever, then, considers at all, *must* behave well at his prayers, and so doing, he gives the strongest pledge of behaving well afterward, when his prayers are over, and the grace then asked for is to be tried in active life. For as was said, by the very act of praying you confess that God sees you in secret. If he see you while you are praying, of course he sees you also when the prayers are over. You are not out of his sight the moment you rise from your knees. Neither is it possible, if you are really devout when you pray, that you should become indevout presently after. The fragrance, as it were, of the holy offering will continue surely some little while with you, and dispose you to live in some measure according to your prayers.

Let us take for example a few instances out of our Lord's own divine prayer. Take that which he, by repeating it at the end of the prayer, leads us to think of more particularly. Whenever you say the Lord's prayer, you acknowledge before the Judge of all the earth that you are a sinner deserving God's wrath and damnation: and that you may not lose all chance of pardon, you plead that you do in heart forgive whoever has in any way behaved ill to you. You say to God, "Forgive us our trespasses, *as* we forgive them that trespass against us." Suppose any man rising up from his knees, immediately after offering this prayer, and beginning presently to do unkind things; meeting everything untoward, and every one that affronts him, with cross words, looks, and actions. Is it not plain that very many do so? and what are we to think of their prayers just offered?

Again, recollect that petition, "Lead us not into temptation," and judge whether any person, who has just been addressing those words in earnest to the God

unto whom all desires are known, would find it in his heart presently to renew those loose thoughts and careless habits which are likeliest of all things to lead him into gross sin ; as he knows by long and shameful experience. Imagine, if you can, a Christian man joining sincerely in that part of the Lord's prayer, and making haste, as soon as the service is over, to forget the Lord and his prayer too, and everything else that is good and serious, in dissolute company, profane reading, loose jesting, or strong drink. Make sure of it, there must have been some great fault in your way of praying against temptation, if it be followed presently by your running into temptation. Either you were inattentive, and did not mind what you said ; or you were presumptuous, and thought you could stand by your own strength ; or you were wavering and irresolute, and in your secret soul rather wished for the contrary to your prayer—rather wished to be strongly tempted, that you might have, as you fancied, some kind of excuse for falling. If such were your prayers, no wonder, when the opportunity of sinning came, that you found no grace to stand upright. God, “unto whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid ;” Almighty God, who hears your thoughts more plainly than men hear your words ;—he takes you at your *thought* (if I may so say) rather than at your *word* ; he does not interfere to keep the temptation from you, which you in your heart rather wish to come near.

Perhaps even you do more—perhaps you invite the mischief, and watch for it, and follow after it ; not at all caring for your baptismal vow, in which you pledged yourself so very solemnly to renounce all covetous and carnal desires, so as, “*not to follow* nor be led by them.” To be led by them, is to yield when bad desires come very near you ; to follow them, is to venture near them, to indulge disorderly fancies and longings, to go as near sin as you dare for the moment. Those who do so are as if they used a prayer contrary to our Lord's prayer. They are, in God's sight, as though they said to him, “Lead us into temptation, and deliver us

over to the evil one. Give us up to our own wicked hearts, to the world, the flesh, and the devil." If this would be a prayer too shocking to think of, learn, I beseech you, to be shocked at your own condition, as many as follow up your prayers against temptation by running headlong into temptation. Watch, pray, strive, labor to amend in that respect. It is your weak point: it is there, above all, that your great enemy still keeps hold of you. Once disengage yourself from him there, and you will have made a great step indeed toward complete and final deliverance.

I say, *disengage yourself* from the prevailing temptation; for so, by God's gracious help, you assuredly may. This very evening, when you say the Lord's prayer, on coming to the words, "Lead us not into temptation," you may stop and quietly consider in your mind, what the sins and frailties are to which you are most violently inclined or accustomed; and you may earnestly wish and beg for grace, when next those sins and frailties beset you, to put them by, and have nothing to do with them. And having so wished and prayed, you may, if you will, when the time comes, call your wish and prayer to mind, and leave off the sin "before it be meddled with." Till you have learned to make this use of your prayers, they will not be worthy of your Father which seeth in secret; you must not expect any blessing on them. But when they begin to make a difference in your lives, then God will indeed be glorified by them. His grace will help you to pray better, and still as the improvement in your devotion goes on, your behavior will improve also, till his mercy have thoroughly prepared you for the reward promised in his Son's name to every persevering humble worshipper.

## SERMON XI.

## CHRISTIAN FEAR OF RELAPSE INTO SIN.

ST. JOHN v. 14.

“Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.”

WE are not told the particular history of the person to whom our Savior addressed these words, so that we cannot say whether they relate to any one great and notorious sin of his; we only know that some sin he had, which had brought on him that grievous infirmity, continued by God's providence for thirty-eight years, and only cured at last by the miraculous interference of the blessed Jesus. In any case the same words may with perfect propriety be addressed to every one, (and who is not among the number?) of those whom God's mercy has at any time raised up and relieved from any sickness or sorrow. Let such be seriously assured, that when they read or hear this verse, they have the blessed Jesus himself, the only physician of souls and bodies, speaking to them in his own person, and telling them what use he and his Father intended them to make of his gracious visitation. For even when he spoke the words, he knew that his divine Spirit by his apostle would set them down for our admonition. He knew beforehand to which of mankind, and under what circumstances, the same clear warning would be conveyed by his gospel: “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” And what he so knew beforehand, he surely meant and intended. He meant and intended these words for you, for me, for every Christian who has ever been relieved by him in sickness or sorrow, as particularly as for that infirm

man to whom he was then speaking in the temple. It is not only that his ministers, and considerate persons in all ages, have, as it were, caught up those words, and applied them to their own good purposes; but whoever ye are that hear the words now, he thought of you when he spoke them, he willed you to hear them; he is watching, with the care of a true physician, whether or no you will profit by them.

In order to do so, consider first, what awful notions our Savior would here impress on us concerning the future end and sure punishment of sin. "Do so no more; lest a *worse thing* come unto thee." From what we read before of the sufferings of him to whom this was said, it is plain with what peculiar force the expression would come home to him. "A worse thing:" worse, that is, than a palsy of thirty and eight years: worse than lying, helpless and weary, day after day in sight of relief, and seeing one after another step down into the pool and be made whole, while he was himself unable to stir, and had no friend to lift him: yet, says our Savior, if you fall again into wilful sin, you are to expect worse than this.

Suppose the man never so thoughtless and ignorant, such a threat would naturally fill him with alarm. Coming as it did from one who had just before so clearly shown his Almighty power, it would set him upon meditating, more seriously than ever he had done, upon the infinite danger of offending God, and the absolute necessity of amending his ways. And such, in all reason, should be every suffering Christian's thought, when he thinks on his own sufferings. Whatever you have endured, or still endure, from pain of body, anguish of mind, weary and desponding thoughts, neglect or unkindness of other men, you are here told for certain—and told by one who enters into your feelings far too kindly to frighten or distress you without need—Jesus Christ himself tells you, that far worse is in store, unless you truly repent of all your sins.

Here, then, you at once discern one most merciful purpose of Almighty God, in sending upon men pain

and calamity. It may serve effectually, as a kind of sample, to teach them, feelingly as it were, somewhat of the wrath and justice of God. It may serve to awaken a wholesome fear of falling into his hands without a Mediator to speak for them. And happy indeed will that man prove, whose severe bodily pains shall have taught him in time to recollect and fear the torments of hell, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;" to fear that place truly and seriously, so as to seek refuge from it in Jesus Christ only, and to do nothing which shall forfeit his protection.

Look, again, to a different sort of trial, harder to bear, as some will tell you, than even the sharpest bodily pain, and certainly in general much longer to be endured: look to the case of one suffering from a dull, languid, tedious illness, making all things wearisome to him, and tiring out his spirits and nerves with constant anxiety and disappointment. Even this will be great gain, if it lead his thoughts away from a world, to him at least so restless and unsatisfactory; and teach him to dread that place, where all will be eternal disquiet, without any hope at all; and to long after the reign of peace, of which, by God's blessing, he may make himself sure.

Again, is any one grieved and vexed at the countenance of men changing toward him? because his friends and relations are affronted, and forsake him? or because those on whom he depended, one way or another, disappoint his hopes? Let him learn to dread the perpetual, incurable desolation, in which they will find themselves hereafter, who have gone on slighting God's mercy in this life: let the bitterness of being partially abandoned teach him to beware how he forces God to abandon him, and finally take his Holy Spirit from him.

These few instances may show how much the actual evils of this life, such as pain, languor, desolation, may help to teach us the terrors of the next. And if such terrors reform a man indeed, and bring his natural pride down to seek pardon and grace at the hands of his

Savior, and on the terms which he offers, that man will have reason indeed, reason unspeakable, to bless God for the worst of his calamities.

And to help him the more in learning that difficult yet most reasonable temper of thankfulness in affliction, let him consider well this other truth, which our Savior's warning voice in the text was meant to sound distinctly in his ears; namely, that nothing can put a sinner in greater danger than an untimely removal of God's chastisements, before they have produced their due and blessed effect, in making him truly seek God with unfeigned sorrow for all his sins: it being but too certain, that most men, too soon after the scourge is off, begin to think merely of enjoying themselves, and recollect God and heaven, the cross of Christ, death and judgment, less and less readily every day. The psalmist's description of the Jewish people in the wilderness bears, I doubt not, a melancholy resemblance to the testimony of many a Christian's conscience, as in many other parts, so especially in these following verses:—

“When he slew them, they sought him, and turned them early, and inquired after God. And they remembered that God was their strength, and that the high God was their Redeemer; nevertheless, they did but flatter him with their mouth, and dissembled with him in their tongue: for their heart was not whole with him, neither continued they steadfast in his covenant. But he was so merciful, that he forgave their misdeeds and destroyed them not. Yea, many a time turned he his wrath away, and would not suffer his whole displeasure to arise. For he considered that they were but flesh, and that they were even a wind that passeth away and cometh not again. Many a time did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieved him in the desert. They turned back, and tempted God, and moved the Holy One in Israel. They thought not of his hand, and of the day when he delivered them from the hand of the enemy.”

Thus mercifully has the Spirit of God condescended,  
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so many hundred years ago, to set down for our instruction the true account of what too commonly takes place in a sinner's heart, when God relieves him after any severe visitation. Indeed, these verses of the psalm declare as clearly as words can do it, how kind and reasonable is the advice offered in the text to a sufferer newly relieved. "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Our own observation must surely tell us—it is well if our own experience do not—how apt men are, when they are "made whole," to relapse into the sins they had begun to repent of; to "turn back, and tempt God," and not think of the day of their deliverance.

Consider the thing a very little longer, and you will see *why* it is so. It is owing, almost or altogether, to our being too confident in ourselves. For there is hardly any time, when people in general feel so certain of their own good resolutions and holy purposes, as when they are just beginning to look up from some overwhelming pain or danger. Then it is that you may hear them assure themselves and others most positively, that "if God will but spare them this time, they are quite certain the old temptation will never more prevail against them:" "they have been weak and wicked," they own, "but now they see things in their true light, and nothing ever, they are thoroughly convinced, will be able to blot out of their minds the good dispositions they now feel." Thus people will run on, and sometimes, as their spirits flow higher, will be more and more confident as their danger draws nearer: not considering that the same frail nature which led them to affront God before, will still continue in them after their sorrow, and will need the same heavenly Teacher, the Holy Spirit of God, to counteract it, else the sin will surely return. In a word, they are half lost already: for already they begin to lean on themselves. Such, for aught we know, might be the temper, such certainly was the situation, of the recovered patient in the text. He might be, as those in his circumstances usually are, too much inclined to take it for granted, that his spiritual condition was good



and safe. Happy if he took the compassionate warning, and indeed "sinned no more," for fear of the "worse thing," which in that case was sure to come on him.

But where things unhappily turn out otherwise; where the caution of our Lord is slighted, and the evil habit, suspended only by the affliction, returns and grows over the man anew; or he falls into fresh transgressions; that man's case is worse in many respects than if he had never been visited at all.

First, his wickedness is greatly aggravated by his ingratitude for God's especial mercies. "The goodness of God," says an apostle, "leadeth to repentance;" that is, the very purpose of the Almighty Father in sparing such disobedient children, was to melt them as it were by his mercy, and make them feel pained and ashamed at the thought of displeasing him any longer. Wilfully to make this purpose void, and think no more of our Father because we no longer feel the rod: does not every man's heart at once perceive how far gone in evil *they* must be, whom any temptation can lead to this? how much worse any sin must become, with such ingratitude joined to it?

Again, as such a case is very bad in itself, so it has the worst possible effect. It sears and deadens the heart and conscience, rendering it more and more difficult for any good advice, either of God or man, to find its way into our thoughts. The reason is, that after you have once been led, by sickness or sorrow, to meditate seriously upon your past ways, you can never after say even to yourself, of wilful sins committed after such meditation, that perhaps you may find an excuse in ignorance or hurry. If you reflect on such a relapse at all, you must own it to be mere wickedness of heart, settled ingratitude to your best friend; and that is a thought so painful, that impenitent souls, in order to avoid it, shrink from serious reflection altogether. Thus every day their bad habits strengthen, while their chance of repenting grows less and less. The evil spirit knows his advantage, and presses them, of course, more and more earnestly with sullen thoughts of the hardships of

Christian obedience. Thus they go on, till they become practically such as the worst of the ungodly is described in the Psalms: "God is not in any of their thoughts." It is so painful to recollect him, that they turn their minds another way, and contrive, as much as ever they can, to live without him in the world.

While the evil spirit is thus gaining strength, the good Spirit of God is gradually so grieved and vexed, that he begins entirely to depart from those who will not listen to his gracious admonitions. He "gives them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and lets them follow their own imaginations." And when God leaves a sinner to himself, we know too well what must follow.

In this sad account of man's spiritual decay, I have had in view more particularly the situation of those who have received at any time remarkable mercies from God: deliverance in danger, recovery from sickness, relief in poverty, or the like: but surely there is none of us, if he rightly consider his own situation, who ought not to reckon himself in the number of those who have received remarkable mercies. To have been born in a country where Christ is known, and his blessed sacraments duly administered; to have been introduced, before you could do anything for yourself, to the light of his gospel and the help of his grace; to know that whatever happens to you here, you have a Savior at God's right hand, who never will leave you nor forsake you, and is fully purposed, after a little while, to make you happy for ever and ever:—are not these remarkable mercies? And when Christians compare their own condition, as partakers of all this and more, with the lost state which they inherited by nature; born in sin, and children of wrath; sure to be lost if God had left them to themselves: have they not good reason, *as* Christians, to listen to their Savior's affectionate words, and believe that he says to *them* also, "Behold, you are made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Surely, considering the infinite difference between our evangelical privileges and our natural state, we cannot but wish to feel as persons who have been wonderfully

delivered from the very jaws of death. We cannot but wish to have our hearts full of gratitude to him, who at the cost of his own precious blood consented to become our Deliverer and Savior; we cannot but feel afraid and ashamed at the thought of forfeiting that inestimable love; and if, having from our youth up been familiar with these wonders of Christ's mercy, it is out of our power to *feel* them so keenly as if they were now for the first time made known to us, methinks an affectionate heart would be so much the more anxious to keep up the due remembrance of them; and show, practically, that they are not disregarded.

To all, therefore, who have been made whole by baptism, and not to those only who have been favored with any signal temporal mercy, the Son of God here gives counsel, that they should make it very much their care to keep up a tender sense of the great things which have been done for them, the wretchedness from which they have been redeemed, and the continual danger of a relapse. I say, men should make a great point of this; they should regard it as a thing to be diligently attended to and provided for. It is in vain to think of continuing religious and improving in goodness as a matter of course; your heart must be steadfastly set upon that great blessing, and resolved to obey the good rules, by which alone the Holy Spirit has taught us to obtain it.

Observe by what steps and degrees that wretched decay comes on, which makes the redeemed of the Son of God first unthankful and then unholy; and do you, by the blessing of God, resolve to set yourself against every one of them.

Thus, there can be no doubt that the first step in most men's corruption and degeneracy is their wilful neglect of private prayer; of reading and meditating on holy things. I call it "wilful neglect of prayer," not only when men begin to leave out their own appointed and customary forms, but also when they begin to hurry them over more than they had done: to let their imaginations wander as they pray; to forget that they are speaking to the great God who has his eye upon their

hearts. As soon as ever any person detects this change in his devotions—and I suppose, if he were ever devout at all, it cannot take place in them without his being aware of it—he has cause to fear that he is relapsing into sin, for all God's mercy in making him whole; he had need turn his thoughts very seriously to that "worse thing," which is finally appointed for all such; he must rouse himself, and pray that he may pray better; he must take so much the more pains to command his thoughts at other times, and recall them often to eternal hopes and fears in the very midst of his ordinary work; and he must turn away more earnestly than ever from such thoughts as are loose and evil. This is no more, surely, than any ordinary Christian may endeavor; and this being sincerely endeavored, I dare promise you the sure help of that merciful and condescending Spirit, who is always making intercession for Christians according to the will of God, that he will help you to pray as you ought. Bodily infirmities may still discompose you, and make your thoughts at times wander: but go on thus doing your best, and then at any rate you need not fear lest your prayer should be "turned into sin."

Again: it is a perilous step toward relapsing, when a man finds himself content to stand still, and taking no pains to get forward. There are some hills so steep, that he who would climb them must keep urging himself upward, else he is sure to fall back: he cannot stop and breathe where he will. Somewhat not unlike this is our Christian task of preparing ourselves for Heaven: this "one thing" we have to do; to "forget those things which are behind, and reach forward to those things which are before." It was the temper of the great apostle: and if men feel little or nothing of it; if they find themselves disposed to rest where they are, and fancy they may do well enough, if only they become no worse, they would do well to compare themselves with him: *that*, one would think, *must* make them ashamed. St. Paul never thought himself good enough: and you, a mere beginner in goodness, are content to remain where you are. Truly that heart has begun to

relapse, which can ever satisfy itself with such a thought. That man must have somehow neglected himself, and let his spiritual concerns go on at random, till, according to the fearful parable of our Lord, the unclean spirit which had gone out of him begins to find room in his heart again. Consider the alarming words which follow: "Then goeth he and taketh to himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first." Who can think of this, and refuse to be prevailed upon not to give way to spiritual idleness: not to leave his soul, whose weakness he knows, "empty," and unfurnished of good thoughts, "swept and garnished" to receive his worst enemy?

On this point of spiritual indolence I wish to be a little more particular; for it is one on which we generally find it but too easy to deceive ourselves. Whoever will look into himself, will perceive there are two several ways, in one or both of which he is tempted to be wilfully imperfect. He may leave out altogether some part or parts of Christian duty, some one or more of the many graces which are the work of the Holy Ghost in God's faithful people: or in what he does attend to, he may be satisfied with going a very little way—may make no effort to advance onward to perfection.

For example: there are persons, and in many respects, good sort of persons, into whose minds it never seems to enter that they will have to answer for the conduct of their servants, or of others anyhow depending on them. They let them go their own way, quite forgetting the praise of Abraham, that he "taught his household" as well as his children; and that if we are bidden to give them what is "just and equal" in this world, much more ought we to provide them with their portion in the means of grace.

Others again, aware of this duty, cannot be easy in the entire neglect of it: they now and then speak a good word to their dependants, cause them sometimes to hear prayers and sermons, check them occasionally for irreligious ways; but all the while there is nothing like a

regular, strict, careful control over them ; nothing to show that our duty to them is constantly felt in the heart as a point of conscience, for which an account must be given at the last day. Cautions are neglected, dangers overlooked, opportunities of doing good put off from day to day ; and by-and-by, when the servant, or the apprentice, or the scholar, turns out ill, men are surprised, and say, "I am sure I warned him often enough : " whereas if they had looked attentively at their own doings, they would have been aware that they were taking the matter much too easily.

Now as it is in this instance of servants, so in all other departments of practical duty, there are two chances of our going wrong, and we are in danger of guarding against one only. We may examine ourselves very strictly on some points, and seem to ourselves very zealous, and be satisfied ; and there may be other points of which we never thought, but of which God thinks a great deal. Or we may go over the whole of our duty to God and our neighbor, as it stands in the catechism, and find or fancy that there is no part of it which we utterly and entirely neglect, and then be well pleased ; although in no one thing are we really trying to do our best. The first of these is the error of persons who, from education, or temper, or other circumstances, have a kind of zeal, but not according to knowledge ; the other of such as have been well taught, and know what is right, but indulge in a sort of lightness of temper which hinders them from going to the bottom of any part of duty. These are commonly more childish ; the others more ignorant and wilful. These are more easily convinced of their error ; the others more likely to make a strong effort, and reform, if you could once convince them. However, both are in wilful imperfection, and will continue in serious danger of falling back, and losing what little fruit they have in holiness, except they will be persuaded, once for all, to set themselves such a rule as will not let them be contented till they are trying to serve God *in everything, and with the very best of everything.*

To conclude: there is one blessing in the church of God, by which, more than by all others, his providence would guard every one of us against these and the like dangers. It is the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper; which, whoever duly attends, Jesus Christ has pledged his word to receive that man into nearer communion with himself, than he could any how else be received, remaining in this imperfect world. Jesus Christ has promised to all who have been made whole by his blessed baptism, the strengthening and refreshing of their souls by his own saving body and blood, to help them to sin no more, and to keep them from that worst of all things, which is sure to come on them if they sin wilfully. Why, if men do not *intend* to sin again, why should they refuse to trust their Redeemer, affectionately inviting them so very near to himself. Why not depend on his love, which is able to protect us against ourselves, more than fear your own future backslidings? against which, if you resolve sincerely, this very sacrament will enable you to guard. That very dread of relapsing, by which so many would excuse themselves from partaking of Christ, is the reason, if you will believe Christ himself, why you should make haste and come to his table. *He* only should stay away who means to go on in his sins, who cares not for the grace of his Savior, and thinks he can do well enough without it. But if there be truth in the word of God, such an one must make up his mind to stay out of heaven also.

## SERMON XII.

## CHRISTIAN HOPE OF IMPROVEMENT.

ST. MARK v. 35, 36.

“While he yet spake, there came certain from the ruler of the synagogue’s house which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the master any farther? As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.”

THE day on which these words were spoken was one of the most remarkable days in our Lord’s ministry—a day on which he seems to have permitted the rays of his essential unspeakable Godhead to break forth with more than usual majesty through the veil of his flesh. The evening before, wearied with long teaching of the multitude by his divine parables, he had crossed the lake with his disciples, and having fallen asleep on his passage, had been awakened by them in alarm at a sudden storm, and had vouchsafed to them a kind of glimpse of his divine majesty, rebuking the winds, and saying to the sea, “Peace; be still.” Presently, on landing on the opposite coast, he showed no less marvellous power over the invisible world of spirits, commanding a legion of devils to depart out of the soul and body of one whom they had possessed, and to enter into a herd of swine, which miserably perished accordingly, before he ordered them away to their place of punishment. And now straightway returning again to Capernaum, he is met by a distressed father, Jairus, who beseeches him to lay his hand on his daughter, then at the point of death. On his way to Jairus’s house, the people thronged him, and one woman in particular, who had an issue of blood twelve years, by her simple faith gave occasion to another manifestation of his divine power and mercy: she just touched the hem of his garment, and virtue went out



of him, and she was whole of her plague. During the delay occasioned by her approach, even while he was yet speaking words of comfort to her, came one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, and said, "Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Master any farther?" In his all-wise providence he had permitted this to happen, just as in an after instance he permitted Lazarus to die, before he could come near to help him. He himself has told us that in the case of Lazarus he permitted this for his disciples' sake: "I am glad for your sake that I was not there, to the intent ye might believe." In like manner, we may well suppose that he ordered matters on purpose, so as not to arrive at Jairus' house in time to find his daughter alive; in this way trying more effectually the faith of the parents themselves, and of all who were concerned, and preparing the way for a more signal manifestation of himself as the Lord of life and death.

He had tried the faith of Jairus, in the first instance, as he did the faith of almost all whom he healed by miracle, in this respect: that he waited for a prayer from him, before he set out upon his message of mercy. To him were thoroughly known beforehand all the circumstances of that young person's sickness: and he needed not that any one should tell him; yet he did wait till her father had fallen at his feet, and related her case to him, before he said, "I will come and heal her." Even so he knows beforehand all that happens to all his children and subjects, yet in some mysterious way he makes prayer on their part necessary to the descent of his heavenly blessings upon them.

We are, by God's blessing, so used to connect the thought of prayer with the thought of mercies from above, that it seems to us a matter of course to say that prayer is a condition of God's favor: but if we will think twice on it, we must perceive that it is a great mystery, a thing which we could never have known had it not pleased the Almighty himself to tell us. We cannot at all understand how it is that our prayers draw down a blessing from on high, seeing that he to whom

we speak knows our necessities before we ask. But we thankfully own that so it is.

Again, from our Lord's demeanor in this affair of Jairus's daughter, we may learn to have reverential believing thoughts of another part of his ordinary dealings with us: his will, namely, to confer spiritual grace in an ordinary way, only by sacramental signs. He could have healed her as he did the centurion's servant, or the nobleman's son, or the daughter of the Syrophœnician woman, by a mere act of that same infinite power, whereby in the first beginning of things, he said, "Let there be light, and there was light." But we see it was his will, on this and on other occasions, to use outward and visible signs, for the purpose of conveying, as it were, the virtue which went out of him. It was his will that the daughter of Jairus should not revive until he had actually laid his hands upon her: as in another case he made clay wherewith to anoint the eyes of the blind man, and touched the ears and tongue of the deaf and dumb, instead of merely commanding that they might be made whole. It is reasonable to believe, that by this part of his dispensations, our gracious Savior intended his people to understand, what they should think of those outward sacramental signs, which it was afterward his will to ordain for tokens and channels of his saving and sanctifying grace. We need no more doubt that virtue goes out of Christ by the water of baptism, or the consecrated bread and wine of the holy eucharist, than we should have doubted in those days whether or no virtue went out of his blessed body, had we stood by and seen that as many as touched him were made at once perfectly whole.

A third point of our Lord's divine and gracious dealings with his people, is what the church teaches us to call his preventing grace: that is, his being beforehand with us, pouring into our hearts by his good Spirit that good will and mind which we never could have had of ourselves. This preventing grace, it would appear, the holy and ever blessed Son vouchsafed to exercise in regard of Jairus on this memorable occasion. For know-

ing what the messengers said apart to the distressed father, he made haste, before Jairus had any time to utter words of despondency, himself uttering words of most consoling hope: "Be not afraid: only believe." Or ever he had time to express his disappointment and anguish, our Lord prevented him, showing that he knew both what was spoken in secret, and also the preparations of the heart of man. Even as by his preventing grace he puts into our minds good desires, before ever we think of asking for them. This power over man's heart is in such sort the Almighty's own, that there is no reason to believe in his having ever communicated it to any created being whatever, man or angel; and our Lord, by exercising it, gave a sufficiently sure token, even through the veil of his flesh, that he is indeed "very God of very God," having power not only to forgive sins and to raise the dead, but also to control and order men's secret heart.

Let us learn by the compassionate haste which he made on this occasion, forbidding despondency, and encouraging faith, while yet Jairus was in that bewildered state, so common at first in any sudden calamity, and had had no time to think distinctly for himself—let us learn, I say, from this, from whom proceeds every one of our holy desires and just counsels. It is the Holy Spirit of God preventing us, that we may have a good will. To him alone be ascribed all the glory. It may be, if our Savior had not made haste, and spoken to Jairus such words of encouragement as those in the text, he might have given up the matter in despair, and have quite lost the blessing intended him. And we, if God gave us not first a heart to pray and to do good works, what would become of our works, and of our prayers? Let us not forget this, but ever remember it, not so as to make our own and other men's thoughts of it light and superficial by irreverent mentions of it, but so as to fear and tremble always in whatever we do toward working out our own salvation, as knowing that it is not ourselves, but God, which worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Our godly mo-

tions and holy tendencies, are so many clear signs that God is very near us, yea within us; we are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and our sin and negligence will surely be punished accordingly. Let this be thoroughly received into the mind and heart, let it be acted upon and made a constant every day thought, that everything good about us is a sign that God is very near us. Then surely there must be an end of our valuing ourselves on our good deeds; we shall not think much of our own humility or devotion, when we consider what it might have been, if we had not wilfully made it imperfect, being, as it is, the work of God's blessed Spirit.

The grace which Jairus was now called on to practise, that of faith and assured hope under circumstances seemingly desperate, is one which we perhaps ascribe to the true source more readily and seriously than we do some other of our right feelings: because the occasions of our exercising it, great afflictions, disappointments, terrors, come often so suddenly and rapidly on, that we feel we could not stand by ourselves: our very senses almost appear to tell us, that we are upheld and braced by something quite beyond ourselves: it is an invisible arm which holds us up: as for ourselves, we cannot at all tell whence our strength comes nor whither it goes.

Hence the common saying on such occasions, that such and such an one is "wonderfully supported;" which I take to be the confession of the whole world, thoughtful and thoughtless alike, that in these sudden trials at least no man can stand a moment without grace from above. It will be well for us, whenever we use that common expression, as many of us have no doubt done, and shall do again—it will be well for us to consider a little at times how deep and awful, as well as cheering, is its import. "The eternal God is beneath" us, "and underneath are the everlasting arms:" this is a thought full of hope and comfort indeed, but it is hope and comfort of a serious and awful cast: it has nothing to do with the lightness, the self-satisfaction the confidence of this world; or with the ready escapes from all

grave and fearful subjects, which the children of this world so abundantly contrive for themselves, even when they are speaking, nay thinking, of religion and of eternity. But the true signs of this resigned Christian courage, which our Lord meant to recommend, when he said to the affrighted parent, "Be not afraid, only believe," are such as these following:—

First, a peculiar way of thinking and feeling about death—the death of a friend, or our own death; as if, to those who die in the Lord, it were indeed the most awful of all events in this world, yet by no means the end of hope, nor the end of spiritual communion by faith in Christ Jesus. The dead are indeed out of our sight, but are they therefore out of the church of God? No, in no wise: they are yet bound to us, and we to them, as true living members of our Savior's mystical body. Whether we can do them good or no, we perhaps know not, any more than whether we can do any good to our brethren whom we suppose to be yet living on the other side of the world; but this we know, that we must care for them as fellow-members. Let not, therefore, the cold faithless spirit of the world come in, as it sometimes will, to check us in our reverential regard for them, and pious endeavors to accomplish, as far as we may, those good intentions which we know they had most at heart. Let us not allow the thought to cross our minds, "It is no use—what do they know of it?"—when we are doing those things which we conscientiously believe that our departed friends, if yet witnesses of our conduct, most approve.

And if not even death must be permitted to overpower us with the sense of our inability to do anything, much less must the more ordinary changes and chances of the world: which leaving life, as the proverb itself teaches, leave a kind of right to hope. For instance, let no person engaged in any good, holy, or charitable cause, especially the great cause of God's church, give it up as a hopeless thing, because he does not see his way through the difficulties which at some given moment encompass it. This is a caution which concerns us all:

for the humblest and most retired Christian, as a member of Christ's body, is bound to have a care for the whole body, as well as for those members which are nearest to him; and although it is often one of the privileges of the humble and retired, to know less than those in higher station, of the public dangers and perplexities which beset the whole body, the church, yet there are times when all of us, who can judge and think at all, must feel more or less distressed at overwhelming or undermining mischiefs which appear to threaten it. Then is the time to remember, that the church is no earthly thing, to sink and fall according to the devices of men: it is the very kingdom of Heaven, the counsel of the Lord, sure to stand somewhere or other, even though in this or that country, for our sins, it may be taken away for the time. Evil times, times when the enemy of God seems to prevail, and to be winning souls on every side from the true fold and flock of our heavenly Redeemer, are the times for often reminding ourselves and others of the sayings of our divine Master on that day of miraculous charity: "Be not afraid, only believe;"—"Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" "Why are you so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" Thus may we quiet our own and other men's misgivings, and hinder them from making us indolent, and causing us to desert the good cause altogether.

To take an instance which may very possibly at one time or another fall within the knowledge and the reach of every one of us; not that of the whole church, nor of the church in any particular nation; nor any public concern at all: but the case of some one known to us, for whom, by relationship, or neighborhood, or some special trust put into our hands by God's providence, we are bound to feel especial interest. Suppose such an one far gone in wilful sin: have you ever done any thing, taken the least step, to reclaim him? Have you not rather said to yourself, if ever the thought crossed your mind. "It is no use, his habits are inveterate, quite worn into him: it is but lost labor thinking at all of it: I will just leave him to himself?" And thus too

often we go on, acquiescing so entirely even in the gross sins of those with whom God had in some measure entrusted us, as to continue our intercourse with them, just as if they were not gross sinners, or as if we had nothing to do with their sins. But let us not flatter ourselves. St. Paul has expressly commanded, "If any one that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one no not to eat." Is this precept altogether a dead letter for us? or is it written, partly at least, for our sakes? For our sake, no doubt, it is written: that we might make a difference between the clean and the unclean; and at least refrain from being intimate by choice with the drunkard the fornicator, the thorough man of the world (for such a person I take to be denoted by the word "covetous" in this passage), the discontented railer at dignities, or the extortioner and oppressor. We may at least withdraw ourselves from such, and from every one that walketh disorderly; and by so doing, if we can do no more, may at least show that we do not quite despair of him, we think it worth while to take trouble, and endure pain, for his amendment. Who knows how much good might be done, how many persons might be led to more serious thought, if in any one town or village those who have the fear of God, would abstain from giving any encouragement to the too common sins of drunkenness, excess, and riot? How many are there now just entering on such courses, or but a little way gone in them, who at present are encouraged by finding the liberties they take treated, by those who should know better, as matters of sport, or matters of course; but would be startled and checked if they really found the countenances of those they love altered toward them! Some too, who are grown old in sin, we may hope, would begin to think where they are—God's heavenly grace would find their hearts less hardened—if they really began to perceive, that every one of those around them, whom in their hearts they must look up to, considered them as really on the very edge of everlasting ruin, and unfit to

be associated with, lest they should draw others after them.

I have instanced this reserve in our treatment of notorious sinners, as one way by which we are bound to show that we do not despair of them; and of course, if it be truly Christian and charitable, it will be accompanied by such other efforts for their good as circumstances permit us to make. We shall be watching for opportunities; praying for them; contriving methods of putting good thoughts in their way. The daughter of Jairus was actually dead when our Lord bade her father not to be afraid, but only to believe. We cannot have the same assurance that Jairus then had, concerning any individual among our brethren, who may appear to us at present dead in trespasses and sins. But we may and must apply to his case the general assurance, that there is nothing too hard for the Lord. We may and must be moved, by the remembrance of such sad and apparently incurable cases, to a more exact and Christian care of our own hearts and conduct. We cannot tell how it may please him, in whose hand are all hearts, to bless such charitable exactness, causing those for whom we care to look in some happy hour toward us, and be moved by our example to attend to the things which belong to their everlasting peace. And so we may do them good for ever, and neither we nor the world know of it, until we and they come to receive our crown.

After all, the most usual and also the most dangerous kind of despondency is our allowing ourselves, as we too often do, to despond about our own possible improvement; contenting ourselves with a few faint languid efforts, instead of really endeavoring to go on to perfection. We look at the behavior of the good sort of people whom we know, and make that our standard and measure, instead of going by the word of God, and the example of the holy and approved men of old. No words can express the amount of blessing which Christians every day forfeit, for want of faith to go by the highest standard, forsaking all human imperfect measures. What is it but this which makes it seem to most



of us no better than a sort of edifying dream, when we read or hear of the first Christians; their continual prayer; their daily communion; their exact discipline of fasting, penitence, self-denial; their bestowing all their goods, many of them, on God's treasury: their extreme unwearied charity; their triumphant martyrdom? "Be not afraid; only believe" that all these things really were, and were for your example; think of them as of a pattern set in earnest before you by him who wills your perfection and happiness. Begin by being as exact and humble as those early believers were in the use of the means of grace; and who knows with what large measures of their grace he may bless you?

I speak more especially to those who have not yet stained their baptismal robe with any gross wilful sin, or habit of sinful indulgence. They of all others are to be encouraged to set before them the highest standard; not with self-complacent presumption, as though they were better than others, but in humble hope that in this way they shall most effectually secure themselves against the unclean spirit, who is always waiting to enter in and dwell there again. As for those who have fallen away, they must win their way to perfection through a course of hard and painful penitence, in proportion to the greatness of their fall; but let them not imagine that the way is shut against them: they may yet do great things, if they will not be afraid to deny themselves, if they will only believe that it is good for them to mind only their duty here, and wait for their comfort until they come to the other world.

You have seen in what instances of duty Christians seem generally most to need such a warning as that of our Lord to Jairus in the text; viz. in all those cases in which we are apt to say, "It is no use;" especially in our remembrance of the dead, in our judgment of others who seem to be very corrupt, and in our taking up with an imperfect standard for ourselves.

In conclusion, I would observe on the *form* which we commonly find this unchristian cowardice assuming. People's despair of a good cause, or of their own or

others' reformation, does not induce them, so often, avowedly to give it up altogether, as to make a sort of compromise with the powers of evil; going some way to meet them, in order, as we fancy, to hinder them from rushing violently on, and quite getting the better of us. Into this kind of snare, it would seem, no less a person than the blessed apostle St. Peter did at one time fall, when he refused to eat with the Gentile Christians, for fear of affronting the Jewish ones. The excuse seemed plausible, viz. that if he did not so accommodate himself to their prejudices, they would very likely take such offence as to fall back into Judaism again, and so throw themselves entirely away. How often, in these days, do we hear the same kind of argument used! A small sacrifice of principle, we are told, is worth making for the great good of the community; some improper liberties may be allowed for the edification and salvation of Christian souls. Thus good persons argue, "We must go so far with the world, must encourage such and such amusements and pursuits, which we heartily disapprove of, else we shall never get the world to go any way with us." Thus the children of the holy catholic church, not seldom openly and on principle, and without any pretence of necessity, encourage the sin of schism, by way of avoiding the greater sin of heathenish immorality and indifference. But surely in these and all other cases there must be some way of going right, without any wilful sin at all. God's hand is not waxed so short, that his servants should ever think it necessary to do the least evil, that the greatest good should come.

Let us then make up our minds to discard and renounce, once and for ever, the practice of putting off hard unpleasant duties, or shrinking back from charitable efforts where the case is unpromising, under pretence that it is of no use. Such a course is shrinking from the cross the moment we begin to feel it heavy, It is, in a word, contrary to the temper of martyrdom; and what more can a Christian desire to make him renounce it, as displeasing to Jesus Christ?

## SERMON XIII.

## ALL OUR DISTRESSES KNOWN TO GOD.

ST. MATTHEW vi. 32.

“For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

ONE great reason why people run into so great differences of opinion, and, of course, mistakes and errors, about religion, seems to be this—that they too often consider it themselves, and set it forth to others, in a partial way—not having patience (perhaps) to put things together, and to observe how the doctrines and rules of the gospel, like the links of a chain, depend one on another, and may not be separated without injury to the cause of truth.

Thus, for instance, as to anxiety, hope, or fear, of what may be coming on us on this side the grave, nothing can be plainer, nothing more decisive, than the rule which the blessed Jesus, with his own sacred lips, delivered, and which the Holy Spirit has recorded for the guidance and consolation of Christians in all ages; “Take no anxious thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto each day is the evil thereof.” This rule is certainly plain and decisive, and yet how do we neglect and forget it? I might say, what pains have men taken, men of business and men of learning, to explain away the doctrine more or less, to obtain excuses and allowances for care and anxiety, just as if they were desirable things, and what one would be sorry to part with.

Thus, it is not uncommon for people to say, or at least to think, that care and anxiety, however wrong

and unsuitable for a Christian in matters of less consequence, are nevertheless allowable, if not right and proper, when great troubles seem to be approaching; for instance, if poverty, ill health, or the loss of friends, or of character, is to be apprehended. In such cases it is supposed, that to think of being free from care and anxiety is a mere fancy, that to endeavor to take no thought for the morrow in such cases is rashness and presumptuousness on God's merciful providence, and shows rather a want of the common feelings of humanity, than a suitable submission to the Divine will—indeed, that it is of no use to say what people *ought* to do under such severe trials; for that they *cannot help*, even if they would, being very full of anxiety, very often of alarm, about what distresses may be coming on them.

Now, let us consider the thing temperately, and in a Christian way. People say, "it is natural, they *cannot help* being anxious and alarmed about approaching troubles." True, they cannot help it, if they look not beyond themselves and their own strength and resources. "We shall lose this, and we shall lose that; we shall be left destitute, helpless, friendless—nothing but misery and distress around us." Such is the voice of weak nature.

But is weak nature the support, the guide, of a Christian? Have we not the voice of God himself assuring us, that if we keep quietly along the path of duty, all will come right at last? He has not forgotten us. He will lay upon us no more than he will enable us to bear, if we faithfully ask his aid. "Our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of all these things." If he think proper to withhold them from any or all of us, what then—is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own? and, besides, has he not repeatedly and positively assured us, that affliction and suffering in this present brief state are intended for our good, in that endless state to which we are passing?

It is not, however, my present purpose to speak of the benefits of affliction, great as they may be; but

only to press on your thoughts this one consideration, that, in every suffering of body or mind, the great eternal God knows and measures most exactly our afflictions, be they what they may, great or small. The doctrine was known of old to the psalmist, and was evidently a great and solid comfort to him. But it was most expressly declared by our Savior Christ himself: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." As much as to say, It is not that God is ignorant of man's distresses, or that, knowing them, he is indifferent about them; but he has good reasons for sending such and such afflictions, on such and such persons. If they are truly wise, they will take them, as sent by him, with constancy, penitence, and hope; if vain and self-willed, they will fret and disturb themselves with useless anxieties, and be in the end nothing the better for what their compassionate heavenly Father meant to be of the greatest good to them.

Suppose, now, the case of persons suffering under the great trial of extreme poverty. Let us suppose that a man has a large family dependant on him, that he can scarcely obtain half work, or, perhaps, not near so much even as that; let us suppose that he sees his children around him almost naked, and that to provide necessary food for them he has been obliged to part with articles of furniture almost as necessary; and, perhaps, in addition to all this, may have illness in his house—with little or no prospect to human eyes of things being much better, perhaps, for a long time to come.

Now, such a person, if he be a kind husband and father, it is difficult to estimate how much he must suffer—not so much for himself, as for those around him. And, perhaps, it may be thought absurd to advise such an one not to be full of care and anxiety—to take no thought for the morrow—for, of course, he *must* be anxious, and it is mere mockery to desire him not to be so.

But, I ask, is not the voice of Jesus Christ expressly directed to a person under such a trial: "be not of

anxious, doubtful mind ; for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things." He *knows* your wants, your sufferings, most exactly.

It must be to persons under affliction that such a doctrine must be addressed ; for to them only it could properly be applied. It could have no meaning to persons *not* in affliction.

Now then in the affliction of poverty, as in others, the truth must still remain the same. This cannot be denied. That is, one might say with reason to a destitute person, to one whose family around him was suffering from want of food, of clothing, of health—to him it might be said, do you think that God has forgotten you—that he has overlooked your pitiable case—that he knows not how much you suffer—weakness of body and distress of mind. Rather be assured, in your Savior's own words, that your heavenly Father knoweth that "you have need of all these things:" when you had them, it was of his giving—now they are gone, he took them away.

But it will be said, if God sees his faithful servants in affliction, and knows what things they have need of, why does not he, the Father of mercy, listen to their supplications, and supply their wants? To this what can we answer?

Can we say any of us that we *are* faithful servants—so faithful as to deserve his blessings—so diligent as not to deserve his chastisements? Can any of us venture to say this of ourselves?

Besides, we do not know what reasons God may have for afflicting us. Some of these reasons may be plain to a considerate person, but there may be others beyond our reach.

Certainly then, whether he think best to relieve men's wants or no, they are not concealed from his observation. "Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of." Our blessed Redeemer's way of speaking is extremely to be observed: "Your heavenly Father knoweth." He does not say, God knoweth, or, the Lord knoweth, but, "your heavenly Father" knows your

wants, regards them with a parent's feelings. Is not the very expression full of consolation!

Let us consider now a little, in the same point of view, a very common case, the case of persons suffering from ill health.

Our heavenly Father certainly knoweth that we have need of health and strength for the accomplishment of the various tasks allotted to us each in our several stations in this our probationary life.

And yet he thinks proper very frequently indeed to deprive us of health and strength both, in greater or less degrees, and for longer and shorter periods, according to his good pleasure. In pain and weakness, whether of body or of mind, we require some strong powerful motives for hope and cheerful resignation. I say, hope and cheerful resignation, as Christian graces, distinguished from that cold heartlessness sometimes called patience, when people say they bear things *because they must*, a way of speaking more suitable, or at least more allowable, for a heathen, than becoming those who are called by the great name into which we have been baptized.

I say, then, in pain and weakness of body, in low spirits, in fears and anxieties, in distress and anguish of mind, which few perhaps are quite strangers to, and all at least are liable to, under such severe trials, what do we naturally sigh and long for—for better health, for returning strength, for an alleviation of pain, for sweet refreshing sleep, for calm and cheerful spirits—these we naturally and anxiously long for, yet perhaps they are denied us; perhaps they are taken from us never more to be restored to us on this side of the grave.

What then! still the truth remains the same, "our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of all these things." He knows we have need of them, though in mercy not in wrath he refuses to grant them to us.

For, I repeat it, let this one thing be considered, that God our heavenly Father knows and feels all our wants. Suppose, as I said, the case of a person who is in great bodily pain. Few perhaps know what he suffers, and

fewer still care much about it. Yet let him remember there is one who knows exactly what he suffers, and who, in the beautiful and soothing language of Scripture, is touched with the feeling of his infirmities, even he who suffered for us in the flesh, our adorable Lord and Redeemer.

Or to take another common case, that of persons suffering from low spirits. It might be asked, is this anything extraordinary; is it not very natural, and just what was to be expected? But it is said, "low spirits are such a very great affliction, worse very often than pain and sickness." So they are, but still your heavenly Father knows exactly what he lays upon you, be it more or less. He is close to us, observing, watching us narrowly. He knows what pain and anguish of mind are—he whose soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death. And will he not sympathize with his weak and faltering children in their sorrows?

If we think he will *not*, let us seek a better master, a more loving compassionate Savior than the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we think he will, O let us cast our burden upon his cross, and say with that holy patriarch (who yet knew not the things which we know), "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Another sort of trial there is, very severe, to which we are necessarily exposed in this our present temporary state of banishment, and this is, the loss of friends. The loss of friends may be of two kinds; either by death, or from some unhappy dislike, coldness, or misunderstanding. Of the two, surely the last is the most severe affliction. Nevertheless the first mentioned, the loss of friends by death, though it be in fact nothing but a temporary separation, yet it is a trial that touches us very nearly, and to be properly sustained, requires a great portion of that true resigned patience, which is only to be obtained at the throne of the heavenly grace. For certainly, all things considered, the kindness of dear friends and relations is one of the blessings we seem least able to spare. The world at the best is not much



to be trusted ; it knows but little of our afflictions, and what it does know it does not much care for. The love of friends and relations seems (and no doubt it is) mercifully intended by God's merciful providence to make up, as it were, for the world's unkindness or neglect. Hence we seem with great reason to have almost as much need of the kindness of friends and relations, as of any of what are commonly called the necessaries of life—food for instance, or clothing. For the human mind seems to need sympathy and kindness as much as our bodies require to be cherished with daily sustenance. "Our heavenly Father then knows that we have need of all these things ;" of the tender sympathy, the watchful love of relations, and friends scarcely less valuable than relations. Yet he constantly takes them from us : not because he is ignorant of our natural love for and dependance on them, nor because he is insensible to the bitter pang of separation, but for wise and merciful reasons, some of which perhaps we can guess at, but other reasons, though equally wise and merciful, are no doubt beyond our reach, at least at present.

But, however, the point to be insisted on, and urged home to the thoughts of serious persons, is this—that our heavenly Father thoroughly knows the need we have of friends and relations, even then when he removes *them* from us whom we have most reason to love.

This is no fanciful speculation, but the plain doctrine of Jesus Christ himself, our only hope.

But there is another kind of loss of friends, which to some persons at least, and under some circumstances, is a more trying affliction even than that separation which death causes.

And this is when from some unhappy dislike, coldness, or disagreement, the band of mutual love and confidence is broken. This is, indeed, a great affliction, especially to the Christian's heart, who, feeling himself here in a desolate wilderness, has learned the value of a true, a Christian friend. And especially is this affliction increased, if we have reason to blame ourselves for our loss, if by our own hastiness, ill temper, or rash judg-

ment, we have alienated a friend's affection from us: or if, on the other hand, those whom we had accounted faithful, have turned out unfaithful.

In either of these cases, the trial becomes very severe, though, indeed, in the present state of the world, it is such as is by no means uncommon, as we well know. Yet, I say, even in these cases, it is a solid consolation to reflect: "Our heavenly Father knows what things we have need of," knows that we need a gentle and soothing hand to heal our wounds, and restore us to peace.

And then if we lose all other friends, the loss, however great, may be submitted to, so we lose not him.

One other sort of trial I would wish to notice—one of a peculiarly painful nature, at least to most people—and that is what is commonly called a bad name, or loss of character.

In one respect this is even a greater affliction than *poverty*, or illness, or loss of friends; namely, that it shuts a person out from all sympathy and compassion almost. For the world is always more ready (and, alas! not without some reason) to believe the ill than the well of any person. This is, indeed, directly contrary to Christian charity; but Christian charity is not the rule of the world.

Our *natural* feeling would lead us to sympathize with a fellow-creature in extreme poverty, violent pain, or the loss of dear friends. But if a person's character is vilified, and his good name injured, it is too often at once believed to the very outside: and no one is sorry, for every one takes it for granted that it is no more than he deserved, and people will even think it their *duty* to speak evil of the wicked.

My brethren, I know not where we are taught that it is our duty to speak evil of the wickedest. The Christian rule is very different:—"Speak evil of no man." But, however, it is very certain, that many sincere Christians have at different times been brought to unknown sufferings, by the thoughtlessness or slander of other people—to sufferings, I say, unknown to all but

to him who seeth in secret. This, perhaps, is on the whole one of the severest trials that we can be exposed to, for the reason mentioned above, that it puts us out of the reach of human sympathy, and exposes us to general scorn and contempt. This sort of suffering seems to be often alluded to in the Psalms. And it is what no one can say that he is secure against—for any one can tell a lie of another. It is also a trial to which God has often subjected his most faithful servants in every age.\* Still, whatever may come upon us, the truth of God stands unchanged. "Our heavenly Father knows what things we have need of"—feels all our sorrows, sympathizes with us, not only in our severest distresses, but even in those which are accounted small and trifling; such as pass like clouds over the soul from time to time—even these little daily griefs he knows of and observes.

If this doctrine be true, (and who can deny it—who can doubt it?) then let us bless God's Holy Spirit for revealing it to us, and, by his gracious aid, apply it as he intended it should be applied, to our furtherance in evangelical doctrine, Christian practice. Let us consider deeply and seriously, "the love which God hath to us," the tenderness, the anxiety with which he watches over us, and then wonder at ourselves that we can ever distrust him, even for a moment.

Let us still bear in mind, that we are not placed in this world to enjoy ourselves; but to be exercised and disciplined in order to our admission to a world of real enjoyment, lasting happiness, eternal rest.

Let our life be a life of prayer, of constant aspirations after the aid of the Holy Spirit, without which we cannot but fall—without which we have no strength. Then whatever is sent upon us, joy or sorrow, good or evil, let us labor to receive it calmly and temperately—neither overmuch elated by prosperity, nor much cast down with adversity—but still remembering from whose hands they

\* See Gen. xxxix. 14; Num. xvi. 14; 1 Sam. xxii. 13; 1 Kings xviii. 17; Ezra iv. 12; Job xvi. 20; Jer. xx. 10; Amos vii. 10; but chiefly, St. Matt. xi. 19; xii. 24; St. Luke xxiii. 5; St. John v. 18.

both come, and only anxious that we may make that use of them, which our heavenly Father intends we should. For “nevertheless,” (that is, whatever doubts and perplexities may surround us, never perhaps in this life to be alleviated or removed—at least there is no promise that they shall be :)—

“ Nevertheless, I am continually with thee :  
Thou hast holden me by my right hand ;  
Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,  
And afterward receive me to glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but thee ?  
And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.  
My flesh and my heart faileth ;  
But God is the strength of my heart,  
And my portion for ever.”

## SERMON XIV.

## THE DANGER OF SELF-CONFIDENCE.

JER. xxii. 21.

“ I spake unto thee in thy prosperity ; but thou saidst, I will not hear.”

WHATEVER may be the degree of knowledge, or of confidence, which prevails among Christians of the latter days, there is great reason to apprehend that there prevails also a portentous neglect of serious consideration—of such consideration as would lead men to a sense of their real condition, and of the necessity of their having their practice more and more suitable to their high and heavenly profession.

Instances of this alarming want of consideration may be noticed, first, with respect to the plain tremendous doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments; secondly, with respect to the doctrine, no less plain and unquestionable, of the little or no real importance of the world's goods or evils, considered only in themselves.

In both these instances it is but too evident, so great is the decay of sound Christian piety, that the instinctive anxiety of the very birds and beasts for their own welfare ; their instinctive attachment to, and confidence in, those who attend upon them—are constant, silent upbraidings to *us*—upbraidings of *our* want of confidence in our only friend—our want of care and anxiety for our eternal interests.

“ The stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed time ;  
 And the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the  
     time of their coming (and going) ;  
 But my people know not the judgment of the Lord.”  
 “ The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib ;  
 But Christians do not know, my people do not consider.”

Let us now turn our thoughts to another familiar instance in proof of the same sad truth.

Christians are taught, at least in words, to believe, that riches, and, indeed, any kind of worldly prosperity are exceedingly dangerous to us:—that they prove, very often, too great a trial for men's principles; a snare in which they are entangled to their own destruction. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," to submit himself to the mortifying precepts of the gospel. So said our blessed Lord, and we no doubt believe him.

"The love of money is the root of all evil." So said the great apostle; and if our experience does not convince us, at least we must believe St. Paul. We believe him; but do we consider what must be the consequences of such a belief if we proceed to them? Can they be anything less than this:—that each of us, separately, in our own persons, must actually and constantly endeavor to keep up in our minds a sense of the danger we are in, in respect of the love of money. "The *love* of money," I say, for that may be as strong in the poorest as in the richest.

This love of money, in whatever way it shows itself, is in all possible ways to be resisted, and kept out of the heart. For in proportion as that is cherished, the faith and practice of the gospel must of necessity be neglected and forgotten. I say, the *sincere faith* and *practice* of religion must be neglected; for it is not to be denied but the outside show and profession, enough to satisfy ourselves and other people, may be kept up, even where the love of money rules the heart.

So necessary is it, in this as in other respects, that we look home to ourselves, and ascertain that our devotion is not merely external, but real, substantial, practical.

"I spake unto thee in thy prosperity;  
But thou saidst, I will not hear."

Such was the affecting remonstrance of Almighty

God with his chosen people of old, when, having done for his vineyard all that could be done for it, he looked in vain for real, substantial fruit. It brought forth, indeed, wild grapes—outside forms, shows, and professions of religion; but in practice they revolted more and more, till “from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head, there was no soundness in it:” all orders and degrees, from the lowest to the highest, “had corrupted themselves,” and were gradually drawing and departing farther and farther from the living God.

To Christians also, to ourselves, the same touching remonstrance is doubtless addressed; and, if any difference, we surely have reason to be *more* deeply affected by it, even than the Jews could have been expected to be. And this any considerate person will but too easily allow, who turns his thoughts to the present state of practical religion in the Christian world.

Is it not then certainly true, that worldly ease and prosperity are very dangerous to the spiritual interests of men? And yet is it not also true, that Christians “do not consider” this, but persist in their earnest endeavors and desires after present ease and prosperity, just as if there were really little or no danger in such success?

The account given in the text is not the account of one nation only, or of one age. It is the account of the human heart—a charge to which we must all plead guilty:—

“I spake unto thee in thy prosperity;  
But thou saidst, I will not hear.”

The word here translated, “prosperity,” signifies properly “calmness, tranquillity, self-satisfaction.” It does not merely mean (what is generally understood by the word prosperity) the possession of money, and other such advantages, but also any state or business of life, which makes a person unwilling to apply to his heart or his conscience those truths of the gospel especially, which might lessen his confidence about himself, and his spiritual estate.

When "God speaks to men in this their" fancied "prosperity," how often in the pride of their hearts, do they refuse to "hear."

They will not hear, because they "will not consider." Thus, for instance, when things go well with a man, and he has sufficient to maintain himself and his family comfortably and creditably according to his station in life: I do not say that a person has not reason to bless God for such advantages, but still I consider that his case is one of great difficulty and danger.

It is indeed true, let our circumstances be what they will, in the height of prosperity, or the depth of adversity, that we are, as Christians on our trial for eternity, in great difficulty and danger, much more than we are generally willing to believe.

But there is this which makes prosperity a greater danger to us than adversity, that it renders us less willing to listen to the voice of truth and conscience.

When worldly things have gone well with a person, and he has not yet neglected his eternal interests, there is still hope that adversity may bring him back to his God. But if things have gone ill with a man, and yet he is still worldly-minded and irreligious, what hope is there that prosperity will effect what adversity could not do.

The reason is, because worldly business, especially if it be at all successful, is apt to intoxicate the mind, as a dram, and to make a man unable to collect his thoughts and fix them steadily on any object which is not some way or other connected with his immediate interests.

But adversity, sorrow, and suffering, if the heart be not quite hardened against the convictions of conscience, as they make us *feel* our frailty and dependancy, so they have a natural tendency to make us look beyond this present scene for support and consolation.

And therefore, of the two, if it were left for us to choose for ourselves, no doubt a life of adversity is to be preferred to a life of prosperity. In proof of this, let us only consider—Are we not Christians—followers



of Jesus Christ, at least by profession? If so, what must be our rule of life: or can it be any other than that which our Lord and master has prescribed for us, and sanctioned by his own perfect example.

Surely no one can presume to say or think that any course of conduct, any way of life, can be more suitable for a Christian, than that which Jesus Christ himself followed during his abode on earth. And was *his* a life of ease and prosperity in the usual sense of these words? Rather was it not one unceasing course of labor, anxiety, disappointment, sorrow, and suffering? It cannot be doubted but that, if he had chosen, he might have manifested himself to the world in another character, as a wealthy, prosperous prince, surrounded with every enjoyment and luxury, victorious over his adversaries, and honored by his subjects.

Such, his disciples and first followers hoped he would be, but he never gave the least encouragement to any such expectations. He taught them, "that the Son of man" himself must suffer every indignity from "the hands of sinful men," and that it was useless for any one to think of "coming after him," who was not prepared to "take up his cross daily, and follow him."

Surely then, adversity, sorrow, and suffering, must be best for us, must tend to bring us more nearly to a resemblance of our heavenly Master. Surely, prosperity and success in the world can never be objects of anxious desire to the sincere Christian, if there is danger of their making him so unlike that perfect example to which he looks.

Let it also be considered, that a life of prosperity, and ease, and freedom from trouble, such a life is the least suited for the exercise of those graces and virtues which are peculiarly Christian, and by which our souls are to be fitted for an entrance into that blessed land where sin and sorrow shall be no more.

There is surely no doctrine to be more cautiously received than that which now very generally prevails, that the Christian character is formed at once by some fancied operation of the Holy Spirit on the soul, pro-

ducing a sudden, irresistible effect, working a miraculous change which is felt in the heart, and making the person from that time forward an altered character, a new creature.

The *general* tenor and meaning of the gospel is, doubtless, inconsistent with notions of this kind; and if there are *particular* passages or expressions in the discourses of our Lord, or in the epistles of St. Paul, which may at first sight seem to give countenance to them, yet, on examination, such expressions will in every case be found, by fair judging persons, to be capable of a different meaning from this, which is often forced upon them.

However, it is quite certain and unquestionable, that the gospel of Christ is uniformly addressed to us, as to persons on their trial and probation for an everlasting reward—to persons who have it in their power to refuse or to receive the gracious offers made to them—to persons who are to be through life exercised and disciplined, and led on by degrees toward that perfection of holiness from which our nature was degraded by the transgression of our first parents.

That perfection of holiness is, indeed, beyond our reach in this corrupted world; but we are taught to look forward to it as the end of all our hopes and desires. We are taught that our title to such a blessed treasure was purchased for us at no less a price than the blood of the Son of God—and that the strength by which we are enabled to attain it is not our own, but the gracious gift of the ever-blessed Spirit of God.

Nevertheless, we are instructed at the same time that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling—that if we would be angels in heaven hereafter, we must be saints on earth here—that those dispositions must be daily cultivated and cherished in our hearts through life, which can alone fit us for the enjoyment of that exalted happiness “which God hath prepared for them that love him.” Here, then, we may see and acknowledge the great danger of a life of prosperity, ease, and self-satisfaction; and, at the same

time, the real benefit of adversity, suffering, and self-distrust.

For, when things go well with us, we naturally grow presumptuous and confident. Either our hearts are little disposed toward a contemplation of the heavenly truths of religion—or if they are, yet we are contented with imperfect or mistaken notions about them, and have little doubt or anxiety about our spiritual condition.

But this sort of confidence is ill-suited for creatures such as we—it has nothing of Christian love in it—it is rather the presumptuousness of lost spirits, than the humble and filial dependance of angels.

But sorrow, adversity, or self-distrust, these have a natural tendency to bring down the soul from her high thoughts, to make us feel our own nothingness, and to acknowledge that God our Savior is all and all to us. And so, by degree, we become more and more fitted to join with that heavenly company, whose highest honor it is to cast their crowns before the throne of God, and their perfection of happiness to “sing praises to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.”

If, then, our gracious God has spoken to us in our prosperity, and we have refused to hear; if he have spoken to us in adversity, and our hearts have been somewhat softened at his gracious chastisement, then let us learn to bless him for all his dispensations, indeed, but most of all for his punishments.

But, if he hath spoken to us both in prosperity *and* adversity, and yet we have still said, We will not hear: If, when things have gone on smoothly with us, we have been proud, worldly-minded, or covetous—if, when affliction has befallen us, we have been content to place our trust too much in ourselves or in other people, and too little in him who is our only friend—then let us be assured that we have not yet attained to that truly Christian disposition, which “seeks first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.” But, without this disposition, what reasonable claim can we make to the high

character of disciples of Christ Jesus—what reasonable hope can we entertain of being admitted into the number of his saints in glory everlasting?

These questions let us seriously ask ourselves, and no longer venture to trifle with the interests of our immortal souls. When adversity comes upon us, in whatever form or degree, let us remember that God speaks to us, and shall we refuse to hear?

Alas! too often so it is with Christians, even with those who have abundance of knowledge and scholarship—they have made up their minds as to what notions they will hold to—what course of practice they will follow, and nothing will persuade them, I do not say to lay aside such notions and practices, but only to consider whether they are correct or not.

And so they go on to their death-beds in calm confidence—because they do not *see* the danger, thinking themselves safe.

O! let us beware of trusting to this false show of prosperity, this deceitful glare which (as it were) dazzles the heart, and renders it unable to perceive its real condition.

Let us ever mistrust ourselves, our own strength, our own judgment, nor ever rest satisfied with any advances we may have made in the knowledge or practice of the gospel, but still press forward more and more anxiously for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus.

Let us receive every disappointment, trouble, and mortification, “with both hands, earnestly,” acknowledging it as God’s special favor to us, as a pledge of his fatherly anxiety for our eternal welfare.

On the other hand, let us receive every sort of prosperity, every degree of worldly success or comfort—let us receive such with caution and fear, lest they should steal away our hearts from our heavenly treasure, and we should find, when it is too late, that we have been beguiled of our everlasting reward.

And may Almighty God enable us to open our eyes to our real condition, and to beware of trusting to any fancied prosperity, whether temporal or spiritual.

May he, for his blessed Son's sake, hear and grant our petitions, when we beseech him to make us, in whatever way he thinks best, fit for his beatific presence.

And whether in prosperity or adversity, in joy or in sorrow, in life or in death, may his Holy Spirit never leave us nor forsake us, so that under his gracious guidance, being steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, we may so pass the waves of this troublesome world as finally to come to the land of everlasting life, there to reign with him for ever, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

## SERMON XV.

## FORGETFULNESS OF WARNINGS.

PSALM lxxviii. 34-37.

“ When he slew them—then they sought him  
 And they returned, and inquired early after God :  
 And they remembered that God was their rock,  
 And the High God their Redeemer.  
 Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth,  
 And they lied unto him with their tongues :  
 For their heart was not right with him,  
 Neither were they steadfast in his covenant.”

It cannot, I suppose, be doubted by any person who considers all circumstances, that pain, ill health, low spirits, and other such personal or domestic afflictions, are especially *intended* by our merciful God and Father as means of correction ; to bring us back to himself if we have wandered away from him ; to quicken our zeal and confirm our resolution, if we are already disposed to follow him and his holy will.

Nevertheless, it is a subject well worthy of the serious consideration of all persons who desire to be in the safe way to salvation, how lamentable in this as in other cases, the weakness and frailty of our nature is seen ; how commonly it happens that the best intentions and resolutions, made in times of danger and affliction, are thought little or nothing more of when the alarm is passed over.

Herein, as in many other respects, alas ! the history and conduct of God’s chosen people of old, is but too correct a description of ourselves, of the conduct of too many Christians under the chastisement of their heavenly Parent.

Thus :—

“When he afflicts us, then (perhaps) we seek him;  
 We return and inquire early after God;  
 We remember that God is our Rock,  
 And the High God our Redeemer.  
 Nevertheless, we do but flatter him with our mouth,  
 And dissemble with him in our tongues;  
 For our heart is not whole with him.  
 Neither continue we steadfast in his covenant.”

To this subject I desire, on the present occasion, to draw your attention, while I endeavor briefly to point out two or three considerations belonging to it, which though plain and obvious enough of themselves, yet are such as we all need to be constantly reminded of.

When we are in good health, and engaged in the daily concerns of this world's business, it is wonderful how different things appear from what they do to persons lying on a sick bed, or suffering under any other heavy affliction. I mean this is generally the case; though, of course, there are frequent exceptions; some persons so dead to all sense of their condition as to have neither hopes nor fears about their souls, whatever may come upon them; and some, too, so confident upon the fancy of inward feelings and supposed evidences of the divine favor toward themselves peculiarly, that they would even think it wrong and dangerous to have any doubts or fears about their own final salvation. But this, I should think, is rather to be accounted a kind of stoic philosophy, than the fruits of true evangelical faith, which ever leads to “reverence and godly fear.” Nor is the disposition itself probably so common in reality as, at first sight, it might be supposed to be; the Scriptures so plainly warning us that we shall be judged according to our works; and the voice of conscience, too, so urgently, though silently, reminding us, if we will but attend to it, how unfit we are at the very best, and in innumerable respects, to meet our God. But, as I before said, to the generality of persons, if they are not dead and insensible to all serious reflection, the heavy afflictions to which we are now liable must, when they come, produce a great change in their view of things.

Particularly, one may mention the danger of death approaching, whether from illness, or some accident, or in any other way—how does it naturally—that is, by God's providential mercy—affect our feelings, and startle us (as it were) with the notion of being on the edge of such a precipice, death and judgment close at hand, and no more time for preparation.

Then, if ever, people feel (if I may so speak) the *reality* of religion; they are convinced that it is not a mere matter of words, names, and professions—they earnestly, and without hypocrisy or affectation, desire to have God for their friend, to die in peace and favor with him.

Then, if they are capable of reflection, they look back on their past lives with shame and remorse; they see how much they have to lament of actual transgression—and how much more of sins of omission; how much better they might have been; how much more good they might have done in their generation, if they had but improved the opportunities placed within their reach.

Then they see what a vain, restless, miserable round this world's business is: and how all the things that seem of most importance in it are, to a dying man, of no value at all.

Then they wonder at themselves how they could have acted in such and such a way on such and such occasions—they remember the falsehood and deceit, the drunkenness, impurity, and blasphemy, the bad temper and unkindness, the neglect of God and religion, into which they have suffered themselves to be led from time to time, and if they are not utterly hardened, the remembrance of these things stings them with the sharpest pangs of remorse.

Indeed, the pain of this kind of recollection is so great, that few persons—I mean few who have led profligate irreligious lives—can bear to endure it; but rather would deaden it if possible, with a cold, heartless insensibility, and rejection of all serious thought; or else with the intoxicating drams of enthusiasm.

However, these thorns of a self-reproaching conscience will force their way more or less; and if allowed to have



their proper salutary effect—the effect intended by him who knows what is in man—these painful feelings, I say, would lead on the thoughts of the repentant sinner from the time past of his life, to what may yet be remaining of it. He thinks, if his life may yet be spared, if it should be possible he may be restored to his former health, O! how different a life he will lead from what he did before;—how certain he is that he will never act, speak, or think in the careless way he has been used to—that he now sees things in their true light, and that nothing shall ever have power to deceive him again, as formerly.

Every one who has been used at all to attend the beds of the sick and dying, must be aware that intentions and resolutions of this kind are very commonly then made, and expressed with the greatest apparent earnestness and sincerity; so that, humanly speaking, one could not doubt for a moment that it was *impossible* that persons so expressing themselves should ever return to their former course of life, or anything like it.\*

Yet every one knows, whether they attend sick and dying beds or no, that numbers and numbers of persons who have been on the very brink of death, and have been restored, yet have been in no respect whatever the better afterward for such a fearful warning. Indeed it is so common a case, that no one scarce wonders at it.

Nobody wonders at it who looks only or chiefly to this world. But may we not well wonder, when we extend our view a little farther, and recollect what we are, and whither we are hastening. For we must always remember, what is a most unquestionable truth, that nothing whatever happens to us by chance—particularly of dangerous illness, accidents (as we call them), and any imminent perils to which we may be exposed, we may be sure that nothing like chance has anything whatever to do with them. These things, as we all know very well, are sent by Almighty God on the sons of men for various reasons; but very often, no doubt, for this—

\* See “The Christian year,” *fourteenth Sunday after Trinity*.

by way of caution and warning, to put people on their guard on every side, and to set them on reflecting on their condition in God's sight; on comparing what they are with what they ought to be. No doubt, when our heavenly Father so afflicts us, he *intends* it for the very purpose described by the psalmist, "That we should seek him, and return, and inquire early after God;" that we should in the day of our calamity "remember that God is our rock, and the high God our Redeemer."

But if this be indeed what God intends for our good, when he visits us with any signal affliction, or peril of death—if he deliver us out of the trouble, and yet we frustrate his gracious intention, and lead no better lives than we did before; or rather do not give up ourselves wholly and entirely to his service—what then have we to expect? what more mercy or forbearance?

I say, if we do not give up ourselves wholly and entirely to his honor and service. For the mere circumstance of our being externally more regular and orderly than we were before, though so far as it goes, it is well; yet that alone is no evidence that we are going along the narrow way of life.

There is then no alternative. They who have been brought out of any misery or danger, whether of mind or body; who have been restored from a sick bed, or delivered from any other impending calamity which seemed on the point of overwhelming them; they, I say, who have received any such signal instance of God's providential care as this (and most of us probably have, if we choose to look back and consider), if they have not been the better for it, if it has not had the effect intended, to lead them to a serious life, and preparation for eternity—then let them be assured they are in great danger—then there is reason to fear they have so hardened their affections against the moving truths of pure and undefiled religion, that without earnest, immediate, and painful struggles, we shall never gain that path of holiness, that way of the just, which leadeth "more and more unto the perfect day."

Probably, as I said, there are but few of us, if we

choose to look back and consider, who have not on some occasion or other been rescued from some great and to all appearance overwhelming calamity.

How many are constantly being raised up from the bed of sickness, when all hope has been given up by the most skilful and experienced attendants.

How many accidents of life and limb do we narrowly escape, I might say almost every day; and many people's trade and business is such as ever exposes them to this kind of dangers.

And if we should say any of us, that as we have never been very ill, or in any other alarming danger, we have in this respect no particular cause for gratitude—what then? are we not always in danger? our bodies (as the psalm says) so “fearfully and wonderfully made;” our minds and intellectual faculties so astonishingly constructed and harmonized—that in one hour, nay, in one moment, all may be over with us, our bodies mangled, or our senses gone?

So that to a reflecting mind it seems little less than a miracle, that we should be preserved in the manner we are from day to day. And is not this matter for daily thankfulness? and should not the consideration of it make us ever feel as persons every moment rescued from the brink of ruin, every moment supported by an unseen Almighty hand!

However, as these daily mercies are so slightly regarded, our tender compassionate Father frequently by some more signal visitation, a dangerous illness or otherwise, calls us back from carelessness and folly.

In these circumstances, those who are not dead to all religious feelings, as they lie on their bed of sickness, naturally are led to make resolutions of what they will be, if God will be so good as to spare them this once.

Such a person they remember to have injured or defrauded; this they will set right with shame and sorrow.

Against such an one as they have spoken ill—they will confess their fault, and intreat his forgiveness.

Swearing, filthy language, drunkenness, sins of impurity—all these they will for ever renounce.

The Bible, the house of God, the Lord's day, and the Lord's table—these they will no more be ashamed of; nor will they care in the least for the scorn or ridicule of other people.

Such as these are death-bed resolutions! Alas! I need not say how generally they all pass away as the morning cloud, are forgotten when the danger is over; the love of this world again resumes its place in the heart, and the awful well-grounded apprehensions, raised by the near prospect of death and judgment, gradually fade away and disappear.

Nevertheless, it is a truth ever to be remembered by us, that the resolutions and vows we make in such hours of trial, and on the bed of sickness, these are remembered and recorded in God's book. We may forget them, even forget that we ever had such thoughts at all in our minds: yet, doubtless, they are, as I say, recorded, and will be brought forward again in the great day of final account.

This is a fearful consideration, if any one will reflect on it: and so also this, no less true; namely, that if our heavenly Father gives us these startling warnings, and we slight or forget them, very probably he will never give us the same any more. The time present is all we can reckon upon:—"what thou doest do quickly."

Again: what I before mentioned, and I repeat it, we ought to be very careful of trusting to a partial amendment; of thinking that because we are better than we once were, or better than many other people, therefore we are in the way to heaven.

The religion which we profess is so strict, so holy and heavenly, requires such purity and self-denial, such exalted affections, and, in one word, such an angelic life, that the utmost height of holiness to which modern Christians for the most part aspire, is but low indeed with what seems expected of us, and what the first Christians actually did reach.

We must therefore beware how we too easily satisfy ourselves, and trust to false presumptuous hopes.

Indeed, there is no question but the difficulties which

surround us in this, as in other respects, are great and pressing.

It is difficult to take sickness, sorrow, and danger, in the way we ought. More difficult still, to fulfil the holy vows and resolutions we were then led to make, if at least we had any serious sense at all of our condition.

But amid all this dim and perplexing prospect, the comfort is, that our compassionate heavenly Father knows our weakness, and our wants; that Christ Jesus, who is hereafter to be our Judge, is now touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and that if we will but take refuge in his mercies and atonement, with sincere, deep, and practical repentance, we shall not in the end be forsaken by him, we shall not be left destitute of the aid and guidance of his ever-blessed Spirit.

In this confidence we may humbly go forward, as many of us as truly feel, and unfeignedly acknowledge our own utter unworthiness, and are conscious that we have no hope but in God's mercy through Christ Jesus.

And then, whatever calamity befalls us we may trust to come out of it, as gold out of the fire, still more and more unspotted, holy, and heavenly-minded, still refined to higher degrees of purity and brightness, and more fit for that heavenly society of angels, saints, and martyrs, which even now faintly to look forward to, is a substantial consolation and refreshment, every Sunday as it comes round.

## SERMON XVI.

## DANGER OF PRESUMING ON GOD'S MERCY.

Ps. lxxxii. 11, 12.

“ My people would not hearken to my voice ;  
 And Israel would none of me :  
 So I gave them up———”

It is a matter of painful and startling observation, that very often when people enter on wrong courses, they think they shall be able to stop when they please. They do not pretend to be very good, and they do not mean to very bad. Something between both contents them. As on the one hand they do not set up to be saints, so on the other they will take good care not to run into very gross crimes: and this they think is as much as can be expected of them, especially when vice and wickedness prevail in the degree they do.

The danger, the great and alarming danger, of allowing such vain flattering notions as these to insinuate themselves into our hearts, is what I shall now endeavor, by God's aid, to set before you.

It cannot be doubted, that very often when people get into wrong courses, they think they shall be able to stop when they please. And this notion tends very much to quiet their consciences, and to make them tolerably easy and cheerful even while they are doing things they know to be wrong, or neglecting duties they know to be right.

Indeed, we seem to be taught both by Scripture, and by experience, that the heart naturally becomes “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”—hardened not all at once, but gradually; so that by degrees the sense of right and wrong, of truth and error, becomes deadened,

till at last the conscience, as the apostle says, is (as it were) "seared with a hot iron."

This comes very much from the flattering notion which people indulge, that there is no great danger in this or that wrong habit, because they shall be able to stop when they please.

Let us consider this with some attention, such as the matter certainly deserves.

From what we observe in other people's conduct and condition, and from what we feel in ourselves, we may reasonably judge that we are placed here on our trial and probation for another state yet to come; in other words, that our eternal condition is not yet fixed and settled, but depends on the sort of way in which we shall live and die. This, too, is according to the general tenor of Scripture;—I say according to its general tenor, though there are certainly single passages or expressions here and there, which do seem at first sight to convey a different meaning. But in this as in every other case relating to the interpretation of Scripture, it must always be remembered, what surely it is nothing more than reasonable to allow, that the meaning of any particular passage must be determined by the general sense of Scripture, and not the general sense to be determined by the apparent meaning of one, or two, or more particular passages.

Whoever considers this plain rule with attention and candor, will be convinced that our condition is in this respect so much the more awful and dangerous. Because if God's providence absolutely governed and directed our actions, in the same way as he governs and directs what we call the works of nature, then we could have no power to resist his will any more than the inferior creatures have.

But we plainly have the power to resist his will; it is in our power to do wrong if we please.

And this is not all; for we are certainly more disposed to do wrong than to do right. We may see clearly enough the path in which we ought to walk; yet by some strange perversion we would rather turn

aside from it, into some other fresh and forbidden way. I am not now inquiring into the cause and root of this sad corruption; I only say that such is the fact; and I suppose every person who has turned his thoughts inward, and examined closely his own heart and conduct, will allow that it is no more than the truth.

Our gracious heavenly Parent, in pity to our sad and dangerous condition, and knowing better than we do what must be the dreadful consequences of unpardoned sin in the eternal world, seems, if I may so speak without irreverence, to have done all that could be done for us, to bring us back to himself.

To apply the inspired eloquence of the apostle here, we may say, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how should he not also" have done everything else possible for us.

And yet notwithstanding all, we see that sin, and misery in consequence of sin, do prevail in the world to an astonishing and an alarming degree. How this should be, it is to us a great mystery, one of "the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God." But there are certainly two truths—two facts which no one, I suppose, can doubt or deny; that the great God has done all that is consistent with his wisdom and goodness to deliver us from sin and misery; and also that sin and misery have a great influence on men of all ranks and conditions on the face of the earth.

There is no account to be given of this beyond what the Scriptures give us, and which is confirmed by every day's experience; viz., that this life is a course of trial, proof, and preparation for a lasting state of good or evil beyond the grave: that God having put it in our power to choose for ourselves, leaves us to ourselves to make the choice; at the same time plainly warning us, that if we choose the right path and follow it on, he will help us; but if we choose the wrong path, and refuse to listen to his voice, the voice of conscience, that then he will, however unwillingly, give us up, leave us to go our own way.

Such is the account of his dealings with his own



chosen, favored ones, his peculiar people, his holy nation.

“ My people would not hearken to my voice,  
And Israel would none of me :  
So I gave them up ——”

For what other meaning can there be to such a passage as this (and there are many like it in Scripture), than that God's own chosen people may if they please hearken to his voice, or not, which they like ; that if they do hearken to his voice, he will favor and support them ; if they do not hearken to him, he will give them up to follow their own ways ?

If this be indeed true, and really I do not see how it can be doubted by any one who carefully turns his mind to such subjects, then it is plain that it is a great sign of rashness and presumptuousness in us, if we have begun, or are going on in any wrong course, thinking we shall be able to stop and alter our ways when we please.

I call such notions as these, rash and presumptuous, because they are founded on the opinion—the proud and false opinion—that we are strong enough to help ourselves, without the assistance of divine grace ; or at least, that we are sure of having that assistance in the time of need, whether we seek it in due time, and in the right way, or no.

Few persons, indeed, perhaps none, would openly avow such opinions as these. Yet no doubt a great many act upon them without thought of their being dangerous ; and perhaps we all, even the best of us, are influenced by them, to a greater degree than we are aware of.

For whatever we may think, the weakness of our present condition is certainly very great ; we are much more easily deceived, especially in matters relating to religious practice, than we should be willing to allow ; we are deceived, I mean, not by other people, but by ourselves, by the soothing, flattering, delusive fancies with which we lull to sleep the restless or doubting

conscience. And of these fancies there is none perhaps more delusive or hurtful than that against which I would now put you on your guard, the notion that a wrong habit is not so dangerous, because we may reform it when we please.

The root of this error, if we examine, seems to be want of love to God the author of all good; want of pure devoted charity, that without which, "all our doings are nothing worth."

Because if a person really loved God, or at least really desired and wished to love him, however he might fall short of accomplishing this his desire and wish; yet at least he would not endure to do anything wilfully, which he might think would be displeasing to his heavenly Father, Redeemer, and Guide, the supreme object of his affections.

There is nothing about which we ought to be so watchful and suspicious of ourselves, as of want of love, true and devoted love to Almighty God. There are two great reasons why we should be thus watchful and suspicious of ourselves in this respect.

The one, because this divine charity or love is the very life and soul of true religion: the other, because we are so peculiarly ready to deceive ourselves in our views of this; perhaps more than any other of the obligations of the gospel.

Thus when people do wrong things, or omit right ones, under the notion that they shall be able to alter or improve their conduct whenever they please: even supposing this to be true, that they might so alter or improve their conduct hereafter; yet surely *at the time* it shows a great coldness of love, a great deadness of affection toward their heavenly Benefactor, their only Friend.

And if they should be taken off to the bar of eternal judgment before they had entered on their intended reformation, what could the word addressed to them be but this, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant!"

But this intended reformation, even granting that it

should be accomplished, if examined into, what will it be found to be, or what its value ?

If true religion consisted in the *mere* outward performance of certain good actions ; or the *mere* inward indulgence of certain good feelings, if this were all that is required in the true Christian, then our need of watchfulness and self-suspicion would not be so great.

But is it not true that the law of the Christian is love, devoted love to his God and Savior ; and that for the want of this love nothing can make up ? Is it not also true that we have no way of evincing this our love to be sincere, but by a thorough and earnest anxiety to give up our whole wills, under all circumstances, and on every occasion, to the will of him who is our only hope ? And farther, is it not true that if we are looking after exceptions and excuses, and trying to please ourselves with flattering, soothing, comfortable notions that we are safe enough ; that we are as good as can be expected ; that we shall be better before we die, and if not, the blood of Christ will make all right—I say, do not such ways of speaking or thinking as this show a great want of love for our blessed Redeemer, a great ignorance of the true nature of the gospel, and of the true meaning of Scripture ?

I ask all thoughtful and serious-minded people to consider whether such rash and presumptuous fancies as these do not prevail to an alarming degree among professing Christians of these days, and whether it be not the duty of Christ's authorized ministers to warn his people against such fancies, whether they choose to attend to the warning or no.

“ My people would not hear my voice,  
And Israel would not obey me :  
So I gave them up ————— ”

Every baptized Christian is by his profession one of God's people—of his chosen Israel ; I say, whatever his practice may be, such is his profession, holy, heavenly, and divine.

If he labors, strives, and prays constantly to live up

to this his high profession, then the Holy Spirit leads him as it were by the hand from grace to grace, from one step in holy love and faithful obedience to another, till mortality be swallowed up of life. In God's dealings with such an one, the ancient and just rule is eminently fulfilled, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." They shall be most helped who will do most for themselves. Such is the proverbial rule which the blessed Jesus himself hath sanctioned with his own approbation, and given us to understand shall be the rule of final judgment in the great day of retribution. Nor is it a rule which we can dare to call unreasonable or unjust.

If on the other hand this same Christian, having it in his power to go wrong, does go wrong—neglects duties which he knows are agreeable to his Lord's will, and allows himself in thoughts, words, and actions which he knows must displease him; then does the Holy Spirit after long forbearance withdraw his gracious aid, and leave us to go our own way, as we will not go his.

According to the latter clause of that most equitable rule, "Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he hath;" that is, whosoever will not endeavor to make the most of what is put in his power—such an one it is of no use to do any more for, and even what he has may justly be withdrawn from him.

There is not, perhaps, in all Scripture a more awful, startling, alarming passage than this; because it warns us so plainly, that our notion of keeping up a tolerable degree of goodness, and staying at a certain point, not intending to be very good, and resolving at the same time not to be very bad: that these kind of notions are vain, delusive, and presumptuous, and, as we may with reason fear, will prove at last the ruin of many souls for whom Christ died.

Very often, indeed, in this world, we see people who we are sure must know better, and who certainly cannot plead the excuse of unavoidable ignorance or anything like it; getting gradually into some bad habit, till

at length it as it were overpowers them, and they are "led captive" at the will of their soul's enemy, and they do things which every one wonders at, and which they could not believe themselves capable of doing a little time before.

This we often see, and wonder how it can be, and secretly thank God we are not like such persons, and are certain that come what will we should never act so and so, fall into such and such wilful disobedience and gross sin.

My brethren, let us not be too sure. There are other crimes beside those which human laws can reach—crimes as great, perhaps, in the sight of God, though in the judgment of man they may be esteemed trifling and not worth attention.

And what is yet more startling to reflect on, it is certainly possible for us then to be most cast off by God, when we are most secure and confident of our being the objects of his favor and approbation. Whether this be a common kind of self-deceit or no, it is certainly possible; and the mere fact that it is possible, should humble us to the dust in deep humility, and with earnest supplication to be kept from so dreadful a condition, a condition so forcibly described by the blessed Jesus in his merciful, though severe rebuke to some of his self-confident hearers.

"Are we blind also?" said they: to whom he answered, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin, but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."

It is generally reckoned a sad and distressing thing to see a person cast down with what is called religious melancholy, full of fears and doubts about his spiritual condition, and quite unable to feel those comforts and joys which are often described as attending the sincere profession of the gospel; to see a person so cast down, and out of spirits, is generally reckoned a sad and distressing sight.

But let me ask whether to the view of sober reason it be not quite as sad and distressing, to see people going on calmly, and confidently, without fear or mis-

giving ; nay, with open professions of assurance as to their spiritual state, and yet all the while transgressing the plain moral laws of God in various instances.

This is indeed sad and distressing—more than that, it is painfully alarming ; because it gives one reason to fear that in such cases God in his righteous judgment has fulfilled his own decisive warning,

“ My people would not hear my voice,  
And Israel would not obey me :  
So I gave them up ————— ”

Where is it anywhere said in the Scriptures, that if we can but feel ourselves safe, we *are* safe ? Where is anything like this said in the whole volume of Scripture rightly understood, or carefully considered ? In like manner, where is there any the least hint given, that because we feel ourselves in danger, we must therefore *be* ever the more in danger.

Again and again, I warn, entreat, and beseech you not to trust to your feelings one way or the other. Every day's experience convinces me more and more, that these feelings cannot, must not, be trusted to. If you are displeased with me for saying so ; yet I must say it. If you say that in preaching this, I preach not the gospel, then I say, God forgive me ; yet I must preach it—and wo be unto me if I preach not the gospel.

However, whether I am right or wrong in pressing upon you warnings of this sort, one thing is certain, that we are dropping off very fast one after another into that vast abyss of eternity which is before us : we see in repeated instances, that be we young or old, we cannot reckon with certainty upon a week to come. Can we then venture to stand trifling upon the edge of such a precipice ? Are we to wait till the world grows better, before *we* grow better ? Are we sure that because we feel comfortable, therefore we are safe ? If not, what are we trusting to ?

Our heavenly Father has in mercy warned us of our danger. He has warned us that even if we are his

peculiar people, his chosen Israel, yet if we obey not his voice, he will give us up.

That then is the question, are we sincerely obeying him—do we give up our wills to his: will we and do we submit to any loss, shame, or mortification, rather than grieve his Holy Spirit. Is it all our study to think how we may best fulfil his blessed will—all our labor to put these good thoughts in practice?

If not, we have indeed reason to fear for ourselves—reason to fear, lest if we go on any longer trifling with God's mercy he should give us up, to walk in our own counsels; and at length should "swear in his wrath, that we shall not enter into his rest."

Again, then, and again, I repeat it, "Be not high-minded but fear:" if God spared not the natural branches, his chosen people of old, "take heed lest he also spare not thee."

## SERMON XVII.

## BENEFITS OF MEDITATION ON GOD'S SAINTS.

Heb. xii. 23.

“The spirits of just men made perfect.”

THE sacred writer in this part of his epistle is pressing on the thoughts of those who should hear or read it, the absolute necessity which is laid upon Christians to lead lives suitable to their high and heavenly privileges—privileges more high and heavenly than the greatest vouchsafed to God's favored people of ancient days. Let us first consider a little this argument as it is set forth with such affectionate earnestness, beginning at the fourteenth verse, and reaching to the end of the twenty-fifth verse of this twelfth chapter.

He begins—“Follow peace with all men;” “follow” that is, pursue after it, spare no pains to obtain it—and also follow after “holiness, without which,” whatever we may flatter ourselves, “no man shall see the Lord;” looking “diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God”—lest we wilfully allow our practice to fall short of our privileges and profession—“lest any root of bitterness springing up,” like a poisonous weed in a garden of sweet herbs, “trouble” the consciences of men, and thereby many who were inclined to go right “be defiled,” misled, deceived, and ruined—“lest there be any fornicator or profane” profligate person, who, though he bear the name of a Christian, yet cares not for the loss of heaven and God's eternal favor, so he may follow his own will and way in this life—after *his* desperate example “who, for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright.” And what a warning does that example of Esau offer to us who have the birthright of Chris-



tians, to us who are the sons of God by adoption—when we remember, that afterward, when he wished to inherit the blessing, he was rejected—“for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it earnestly with tears”—so we, if we reject the service of our heavenly Master in this short life of probation, what other opportunity, what other day of grace, can we expect will be granted to us.

For let us (so the argument goes on), let us ever remember, that as Christians we are really under a great, a glorious, and an awful dispensation—not the less glorious and awful, though the tokens of the Divine presence are no longer visible to the natural eye, but are only to be seen by faith.

Great things they were, indeed, which our fathers of old, the Jews, were witnesses of—the mountain rock of Sinai burning with fire—enveloped in blackness, darkness, and tempest; the sound of the trumpet; the voice of words, which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more, for the people could not endure that which was commanded, and so terrible was the sight, that even Moses said, “I exceedingly fear and quake.”

These were great and awful things to which the Jews were eye-witnesses; yet the Christian by the eye of faith sees himself really and actually under a still greater and more awful dispensation.

By his Christian profession he finds himself brought nearer to God than ever the Jews were; he finds he is come not to Sinai, the mountain of temporal wrath, but to Sion, the rock of eternal mercy, and to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem; and to an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven—and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel, cries unto God, not for vengeance, as Abel's did, but for mercy on the guilty. “See, then,” here comes the great prac-

tical conclusion—"See, then, that ye refuse not him that speaketh," see that your lives and conduct be a course of peace and holiness; for, "if they escaped not," that is, the Jews, "who turned away from him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him which speaketh from heaven." If so much were expected of the Jews, who had but the knowledge of a temporal law, what must be expected of us, to whom is offered the eternal gospel—and, I may add, who, so far as profession goes, have accepted the offer.

Whether we shall be any the better for it, depends now on ourselves, and on the course of life we choose to lead.

Now, let me call your attention to one clause in the divinely eloquent account which the apostle has given of the kingdom of God, the church of the Lord Jesus, militant here on earth, but triumphant in heaven. This city of the living God, this heavenly Jerusalem, is, we are told, inhabited, as by innumerable other blessed, glorious, and immortal beings, so also by "the spirits of just men made perfect."

It seems to me, that this may afford matter for some very important and touching reflections, particularly suited for the thoughts of all serious persons on this day especially.\*

When we consider what the condition of human nature now is, even at the best, full of frailty and imperfection—and when we consider, also, what glorious hopes, what blessed promises, are held out to the faithful servants of Christ Jesus, we are naturally led to suppose that the soul will be exalted and refined above all earthly degrees of excellence, when it is admitted into the everlasting habitations—that even just men will be made perfect, brought to higher degrees of goodness, when their spirits are received into the mansions of glory.

Conformably to this view, the whole Christian life is

\* All-Saints' Day.

constantly set forth to us, in the New Testament, as a course of discipline, a progress from step to step, from grace to grace. So that, as the apostle intimates, we can never, in this life, no not even at the best, "count ourselves to have attained"—reached that height of spiritual excellence which we should—never think ourselves "to be already perfect." "But this one thing we have to do—forgetting those things which are behind," all mean, unworthy, trifling objects, "and reaching forth to those things which are before," substantial, heavenly, and eternal things—we have nothing to do, but only still to be "pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

So that the best of men, as long as they stay here, must still be trying to grow better, and even to the very last will deplore with sorrow and shame innumerable sins, negligences, and ignorances.

The best of men in his dying moments could surely offer no more acceptable prayer than the Lord's prayer, and is not that a prayer for forgiveness? Therefore I conclude, that the best of Christians in his dying moments needs forgiveness, that is, is chargeable with faults and errors.

How then, it may be asked, can even the best and holiest man be fit, or have hope to appear, in the presence of his God. I answer, because they have fixed their trust not on anything they have done, or can do of themselves, but entirely and alone on the blood and intercession of the one Redeemer. For his sake alone they are accepted; not partly for their own goodness, and partly for the sake of Christ Jesus, but entirely, wholly, completely, and alone, through the blood of the Lamb slain for the sins of the whole world. Except in that blood there is no hope—no reasonable hope—even for those who have made the greatest advances in spiritual excellence. But then, as we are assured on the highest of all authorities, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord"—in the sincere faith and love of their Redeemer. Blessed are "the spirits of the just," re-

moved from this world of trial and affliction, to a state of perfection in the beatific presence of their God.

In this world, even at the best, they have had innumerable errors and daily frailties to deplore; *there* (as we have reason to hope) they will be for ever out of the reach of temptation.

In this world, even at the best, they were liable to all kinds and degrees of afflictions—pain of body, and pain of mind, remorse for the past, and fear for the future. *There* (we are assured) “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor tears:” but “they who are accounted worthy to obtain that world shall be equal unto the angels.”

Here “just men” must expect, like their Savior and pattern, to be “made perfect through sufferings”—to be exercised with a painful course of trials and troubles—to discipline them, (as it were,) and refine them like gold in the fire. Hereafter as glorified spirits they shall “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,” with no cloud of imperfection, no liability to change or decay, ever, any more.

As these thoughts are not forced and overstrained, but such as would naturally suggest themselves to any one who attends to what the Scriptures say on such subjects, so we may be assured that they may, and indeed are intended, to be of great service to us in improving our hearts and lives—and this in many respects, some few of which I must mention to you.

First; let us think what an encouragement it is to us to go forward on our Christian course with zeal, perseverance, and steadiness, when we reflect on that perfect state of peace and holiness to which “the spirits of the just” shall be admitted in the eternal world.

We very often talk and think of how little value the best things of this world are, its profits, its pleasures, its comforts, all trifles of small account. So we talk, when we wish to appear serious; so we think, when we are really so. And yet, so much are we led by present impulses and feelings, these good words and good thoughts have on the whole comparatively but very little

influence on our every-day conduct ; and we go on, the best of us, alas ! too much, as if this present life was something solid and substantial, something of real importance, even without reference to what may be beyond the grave.

And this it is, among other hindrances, which makes us so slow, indolent, and heartless, in the love and service of our Lord and master ; so reluctant to take much trouble for his sake—so careless about finding out what his will really is in every case—so indifferent about accomplishing that will, even after we *have* found it out.

Hence it is, I do not say desirable, but absolutely necessary, for all who would wish to go forward in “the good and the right way,” that we will still use ourselves to carry our thoughts on to that perfect state for which at present we are only in a course of trial and discipline, that we cheer ourselves with this prospect, and seek encouragement in looking beyond the present scene of things, to that nobler one which the gospel has opened to the view of our faith—that land where “the spirits of the just,” all the holy men of all ages, once subject to the same temptations, trials, and weaknesses with ourselves, but then to be “clothed upon” (as St. Paul says), with bodies spiritual and immortal, shall be received into the immediate presence of their Savior and God, never more to be separated from him, or from each other.

Again, let us consider, that if we are indeed faithful servants of Christ Jesus, then we are members of that communion of saints, that mystical body, whereof he is the head. Then we are entitled to a place among patriarchs, prophets, saints, and martyrs. Then the glory to which we shall be admitted at last is as much above the glory of the greatest prince or potentate on earth, as heaven itself is above this world.

Such, and so great, is the dignity of the true Christian.

It is a commonly received maxim in the world, what one often hears, that people should act with a proper spirit—that they should keep up their dignity—that they

should not let themselves down too low. How much is it to be wished that in this, as in other respects, the children of light would learn wisdom from the children of this world; that we would think of the great dignity and honor we are admitted to in being made Christians—that we would consider how ill it becomes us, “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God,” to trouble ourselves with the mean, paltry, cares of this present life—much less to entangle ourselves in evil tempers, evil habits, or evil company; thereby bringing disgrace not on ourselves only, but on “that worthy name by which we are called.”

The dignities and honors of this world are *but* for this world, and will perish with it. The dignity and rank of the true Christian can never be taken from him: but rather, in that day when high and low, rich and poor, must stand before the same judgment-seat, and be tried by the same rules, then it will appear that all other distinctions are utterly worthless, and that the only true lasting dignity we can attain to, is to be a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was the highest honor which all the holy men have aspired after since the times of the gospel. Apostles, evangelists, martyrs, saints, all have thought it the highest honor to be servants of the crucified Jesus.

This, too, must be *our* highest honor, if we think to be admitted with them into the land of eternal joy.

Another thing to be considered is, of the deep, sincere, and thorough humility which must be expected of those who think to be admitted into the blessed society of “the spirits of just men made perfect.” Indeed, the true dignity of the Christian consists in his humility: “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” How can we in reason expect to be “numbered with God’s saints in glory everlasting,” if it be not our constant study to follow them as they followed Christ, “in all lowliness and meekness, in long-suffering and loving forbearance.”

And these considerations will be still farther heightened, in proportion as we remember, on the one side, our own worthlessness even at the best; and on the

other, the vastness of that mercy, the boundlessness of those promises which are held out to us.

For a mind which is at all well disposed, nothing can be more touching, nothing more humbling, than to receive kindnesses from one whom we have injured.

What, then, must be our feelings when we contemplate our behavior to God, and how he has requited us!

*We* enemies to him by wicked works—He reconciled to us by the blood of his eternal Son; and not merely reconciled to us, but bringing us near to himself, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the general assembly and church of his first-born, to the blessed society of the spirits of the just in their perfect state of happiness and glory.

“What heart can think of these things worthily!” or how can we sufficiently bow ourselves down with humility, and self-abasement, when we thus consider “what God has done for our souls.”

Let me, in conclusion, call to your thoughts what comfort and encouragement there is in this heavenly doctrine of “the spirits of just men made perfect,” to be received into the eternal joy of their Lord. Comfort and encouragement in respect of ourselves, in making us patient, cheerful, and thankful; and in our conduct toward others, in making us brotherly and kind, and still looking forward to a happier meeting in a world where neither sin nor sorrow can enter.

Thus it is certainly a solid ground for inward patience and consolation, to reflect that whatever is laid upon us it is no more than “what is common to man,” as St. Paul says, that is, what human nature must be liable to: that (in the words of another apostle) “the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren which are in the world;” that the most righteous and holy men who have ever lived have passed through the same, or greater trials. How, then, can we expect like them to be glorified, if we are not willing like them to endure.

There are also substantial reasons for sincere cheerfulness and inward peace, to be derived from this same evangelical truth. If with all our imperfections, it be

still our earnest wish and daily endeavor to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ," to draw nearer and nearer to that perfection to which the spirits of the just shall finally be admitted: if this be indeed our daily anxiety, our daily endeavor, then may we reasonably cherish an inward cheerfulness and peace of mind, in the hope that we shall not be shut out from that blessed society hereafter, whom it is our earnest wish to resemble here.

These same thoughts, too, duly cherished, will tend, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to keep us thankful—thankful, I say, not merely for God's mercies, but also for his chastisements; to us, in fact, no doubt the greatest of his mercies, though at the same time they must of course be painful, as the apostle reasons in this very chapter.

For all his mercies, then, we may well be thankful; but above all for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory—the blessed hope of being numbered with his saints in glory everlasting. For this how can we love, bless, and adore his holy name too much or enough.

It is also what may well afford comfort and encouragement to all sincere minds, especially in the present state of things, to consider how the hope of meeting our fellow-Christians hereafter, must naturally tend to make us kind, forbearing, and brotherly toward them, all through this our life of probation.

I cannot indeed agree with those who think it a small evil, or no evil at all, that the Christian world should be divided into so many sects, parties, and varieties of opinion. At the same time it is a great comfort to think, that it is in no case our duty to be angry with those who differ from us; and that it is our duty to pray and hope, that however we may be divided or separated here, yet that we may be brought together hereafter. And then *if* we do pray and hope, that we may be brought together hereafter, that those who now differ from us most widely, may be admitted with us into the blessed company of "the spirits of just men made perfect:" if this be our constant prayer, and earnest desire, then



surely there will be no bitter, hostile feelings, but all will be tenderness, candor, and heavenly love.

In like manner, in our daily intercourse with each other, in the common concerns of life, if we use ourselves to look on each other as fellow-Christians, as travellers on the same perilous journey to eternity, yet hoping to be admitted at last into the same heavenly mansions: this thought must greatly tend to keep us kind, tender, and compassionate in our behavior one toward another; to lead us to make all possible allowances for each other's faults and failings, nor to bear the thought of being in malice, or any ways at variance with persons, who we hope and pray may be our companions in peace, happiness, and glory, through the ages of eternity.

Now what I have said is, I am persuaded, of great consequence, and what we should all attend to, and apply to our every-day practice. Whether we shall do so or not, must depend upon ourselves.

## SERMON XVIII.

## BENEFITS OF MEDITATION ON THE HOLY ANGELS.

DAN. vii. 10.

“Thousand thousands ministered unto him,  
And ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.”

WHEN the blessed Jesus commanded that it should be one of the constant subjects of a Christian’s prayer, that God’s will may “be done in earth, as it is in heaven:” he seems herein to have marked out (as it were) the kind of life suitable for all who aspire to be accounted his disciples.

Their work is “on earth;” in the performance of their every-day duties they “do God’s will;” but the rule and measure of their conduct is not earthly—the obedience and order of angels is their pattern—they are not to rest satisfied with any worldly standard of excellence, nor ever to cease praying and striving, that so far as in them lies, “the will” of him who is Lord of men and angels may “be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

Now if this be so, in other words, if the Lord’s prayer be as it were a pattern of prayers for all Christians in every age (and it is difficult to understand how it can be considered otherwise) then, this thought, viz., that the Christian life consists in the performance of every-day duties on the principles of the gospel, and with the temper and disposition of the blessed inhabitants of heaven; this thought, I say, may be of great use, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, in restraining us from two serious errors, into which from our extreme frailty we must confess ourselves but too liable to fall.

The one of these errors is, the disposition to imagine that religion is a matter of so transcendently high and

spiritual a nature, as to be quite above and unmixed with earthly things. Whereas we learn from Scripture, from its general tenor, and from numberless express passages in it, that the very proof of our religious sincerity is in the common every-day duties and trials of this present life; that as Christians, we are not to "go out of the world;" but what is perhaps a far more difficult task, to "to use this world as not abusing (or, rather, as not using) it;" to consecrate our affections and conduct to the honor of our God and Savior; in short, to pray and endeavor that his gracious will may be done by us on earth, with love, zeal, awe, and constancy, bearing at least some proportion to the pure exalted service of those glorious spirits who always behold the face of the Almighty in heaven.

The other error which we seem hereby to be cautioned against, is one, if possible, more serious and fatal than that just mentioned. It is seen in the disposition which so sadly prevails to lower the standard and measure of Christian morality; when people think, as they often do, or at least act and speak as if they thought, that outward decency of conduct, and keeping up (what is called) a good moral character, were a principal part, or indeed almost the whole of religion.

Too often, anything beyond this is ridiculed as wild, and enthusiastic; only fit for persons of strong feelings, unfit to mix in worldly business, but not to be expected of the generality of Christians.

What, it may well be asked, is it not expected of the generality of Christians that they should labor to be perfect, even as their Father which is in heaven is perfect? is it not required of Christian people in all ranks, stations, and circumstances, that they should set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth? is it a duty required only of some persons, and not of all; of all who aspire to the great name of Christians, that we shall earnestly pray, and as earnestly labor, each in our several callings, that the will of our gracious God may be done by us on earth, as it is by the angels in heaven?

These are questions of grave importance to be considered by us all; especially in these evil days, when Christian morality is so lightly esteemed; and in so many instances false principles of conduct are avowed and taught, evil called good, and good evil; darkness put for light, and light for darkness.

It is, I say, plainly of the highest importance to us all as Christians, that we pray and endeavor to have our affections deadened to this present world, by the power of the Spirit of God to have our minds drawn up to high and heavenly things. This we must still pray and endeavor after, we must use whatever means our gracious God has put within our reach for the furtherance of this blessed end; we must not rest contented with our present attainments, be they what they may, in the knowledge of things spiritual; but remembering that such things of all others are to us most real and substantial—most truly touch and interest us: we must put to them our thoughts, our minds, and understandings; nay, even our inferior faculties, our powers of imagination, our hopes, and our fears, if so be we may by the enlightening and strengthening aid of the Holy Spirit, obtain a powerful and lasting sense of those truths which so wonderfully concern us.

Especially it may seem, for many reasons not difficult to be perceived by any thoughtful person, that habitual reflection on the happiness of glorified spirits in the beatific presence of their and our God; such contemplations, I say, made habitual, as from the clause in the Lord's prayer, before referred to, it may be supposed that he, its divine Author, intended should be the case; would greatly tend to wean our affections from mean, unworthy objects, to fill us with humility and awe, and at the same time to give us a notion of our true dignity as God's adopted children in Christ Jesus; to lead us to follow the guidance of the blessed Spirit in peace and contentment, in love, in the practice of prayer and communion with God, in lively faith in our Redeemer, and in earnest aspirations after that eternal rest which remaineth for his faithful people.

“Thousand thousands minister unto him,  
And ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him.”<sup>1</sup>  
“They praise the Lord, all these his hosts,  
Those servants of his that do his pleasure.”

The mere thought that there are in existence innumerable such glorious immortal spirits—that their God is our God—that let our condition in this world be ever so poor and degraded, yet these blessed angels disdain not to acknowledge themselves our “fellow-servants ;” that they care for us, and, as the apostle says, minister for us as Christians, and heirs of salvation ; and above all, when we reflect that if we are not in the end admitted into their celestial society, good were it for us if we had never been born : the mere thought, I say, of these plain scriptural truths, may well arouse us from the low-born cares and follies of this present world, may make us “look up and lift up our heads,” lead us to consider what we are, and what we are coming to.

If you take a child out in a bright sunshine, and tell him that there are then as many stars in the sky, over his head, as in a clear star-light night, he probably would not believe it, because he could not see them ; and indeed it may be difficult for us all to imagine, what however we know to be the case, that there are as many stars in the sky by day as by night. Something in the same manner the glare of this world obscures our view of things spiritual. It is not without difficulty and considerable exertion that the mind can realize to itself things heavenly and unseen, however real and concerning, and however, too, our reason and understanding may have taught us, that they *are* real and concerning. It is only by spiritual aid, by light from above, that we can overcome this difficulty, and learn to live and walk (as the apostle so energetically expresses it), “by faith not by sight.”

We see not indeed, nor can we expect to see on this side the grave, any of that blessed, innumerable, heavenly company of angels ; yet we are as sure of their existence as if we did see them ; we know in what their employment and their happiness consists ; nay, more,

know that we ourselves may be *even now* like them—not indeed to excel in strength—but by God's aid, like them, to fulfil his commandment and hearken unto the voice of his words; and most of all, we know that the kingdom prepared for God's faithful children from the beginning of the world, is a kingdom wherein they shall be equal unto the angels; where, if one may so venture to apply the sacred proverb, "there shall be one fold, under one shepherd," the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since then, such great things are certainly in store for us, are offered to us all, if we will but accept them on the terms of the Christian covenant—and since this world, with its wealth and its poverty, its comforts and its afflictions, is so soon to pass away from us, or we from it, it must of necessity deeply concern us to look closely into our condition, what it is likely to be finally and unalterably.

To be in the presence and favor of the great Almighty God, this and this only can constitute the happiness of all reasonable creatures, of angels in heaven, or of men in earth.

To be separated from God, without hope of restoration, is the very misery of lost spirits; to feel ourselves the objects of his displeasure from wilful guilt, negligence, and forgetfulness, this in all degrees is the misery of sinful men on earth—a misery against which those who have not learnt to place all their hopes in the blood of the Redeemer have no solid support—and against which also, let me say, those who *have* learned this blessed lesson have yet need of the constant aid of the heavenly Comforter, to keep them "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," under the well-grounded conviction "that their labor will not be in vain in the Lord."

To live in the presence of God is the happiness of glorified spirits in heaven. To live *as* in his presence is the great rule of holiness to men on earth—the rule of holiness and of happiness too, so far as that is to be expected in a place of trial and probation like this. However, it seems unquestionable that what is revealed in

Scripture, however faintly, concerning the blessed inhabitants of heaven, is meant, like the rest of God's word, to encourage us in our difficult path—our path of holy duty—and to fill us with still increasing higher degrees of awe, gratitude, and love toward him before whose throne even the angels cast their crowns.

When, then, in the hours of darkness or of solitude, or in the solemn thoughts which will occasionally find their way into the minds of the most careless, in seasons of fear or affliction; or, again, in the course of those delightful contemplations which to a well-trained disposition ever form a portion of its sacred and happy employments on each returning Lord's day, and other the holydays of the church—when, I say, at such peculiar seasons of reflection our minds are raised to heavenly things, to “meditate of the number and nature of angels, and their blessed obedience and order, without which peace could not be in heaven;” then, also, will the thought naturally come in, “O that it might be so on earth;” and upon this will follow (if we are sincere) an anxious desire and labor to cherish as much as possible in ourselves, and in all over whom we have an influence, an unceasing love of order, harmony, and peace. And toward this blessed end, certainly, nothing can be more efficacious than for Christians ever to bear in mind, that they, too, like the spirits above, are placed each in their several stations to minister to the Most High, to fulfil his commandments, and to hearken to the voice of his words.

For, is it not true that nothing could tend so effectually to produce and maintain peace, both in Christian societies, and in the hearts of individuals, as for each person to attend to his proper appointed work, not overstepping the bounds assigned to him, nor unduly interfering with others? Then will the church of Christ flourish, when “every member of the same in his vocation and ministry truly and godly serves” him.

But when this celestial rule is disregarded, and people, sometimes under a show, alas! of superior sanctity, are more ready even to hinder and check other men's du-

ties, than with a meek and quiet spirit to fulfil their own; then, instead of harmony and peace, there will spring up envy, discord, and confusion; then the name of God and his doctrine will be blasphemed; then Christians, instead of taking example from the angels of heaven, will be more like those lost spirits whom pride and envy have sunk in irremediable ruin.

As it is the employment, so is it the supreme happiness of those glorious angels to be ever in the presence of the Almighty, to stand before him, to minister unto him, to hold ineffable communion with him that sitteth on the throne and with the Lamb.

But now we should consider, if we think to be admitted to that blessed society hereafter, it is even necessary that here, in this evil world, our happiness should be like theirs in the contemplation of God's perfections, especially of his love, and in holding communion with him—that high privilege to which we are entitled through the mediation of his Son, and the sanctification of his Spirit.

And, if this *be* so, then we should consider, all of us who have any serious care for ourselves or our friends, how dangerous it must be to lead any but a strictly religious life—how dangerous, I say, must be our spiritual condition, if it be not our highest satisfaction to cherish a sense of God's love and compassion, to hold communion with him in prayer, in thanksgiving especially in the feast by himself appointed of his own body and blood.

If these things are what we have little or no relish for, then we must be told that our hearts are not right in God's sight; that our having a good, respectable character in the world will be of no avail; that if it be not our prayer and endeavor, our comfort and happiness, in all things to act as in God's presence on earth, surely we must expect, at last, to be excluded from the society of saints and angels in heaven.

These are matters deeply to be laid to heart in these unhappy days, when the Lord's house and the Lord's day are so openly profaned, when (as of old) the table



of the Lord is contemptible ; and when in an evil and adulterous generation, the most of those who bear his name, are ashamed of him and of his words. For, indeed, this does seem to be no more than the truth.

We are born into this world to live to eternity ; but, as Christians, we have been new-born into Christ's church, to an eternity of happiness and glory ; we are entitled to call God our Father, and the angels our brethren.

Heaven is now our home ; and, as every one will allow, it is of far more consequence whom we are to spend our lives among in daily familiar intercourse, than whom we chance to meet with in a short journey—just so much more does it concern us to think who are to be our companions in eternity, “our home in heaven,” as St. Paul calls it—than with whom we are to spend this brief and transitory life of trial.

I mean, that even now it should be our great object and prayer to be made fit for the society of angels—this is of far more consequence than to study the rules of this world, even if they were ever so harmless. How, then, shall we be fit to enter that heavenly home, if our hearts be polluted with earthly or sensual lusts, with covetousness and ambition, with pride and self-confidence !

How will that tongue which has been used to the language of filthiness and blasphemy, of slander and falsehood—nay, even to the utterance of vain and idle words—how will it be able to give utterance to angelic hymns of glory to him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb !

How will it be possible that they should be admitted into the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, and to that innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are enrolled in heaven—they, I say, who by their unchristian lives have, in a manner excommunicated themselves from that heavenly society, and have indeed, disgraced the doctrine of God our Savior in all things !

We, no doubt, flatter ourselves that we are not so

bad as this—that such hard things cannot be said of us. If so, it is well; and we have, indeed, reason to be thankful. Yet, believe me, the present state of things in the Christian world is such as may reasonably excite the apprehension and alarm of all thoughtful persons; on this account especially, because the very principles of Christian faith and holy practice are now so openly assaulted, worldly principles of false morality are substituted for those of the everlasting gospel, and heaven and heavenly things are, in fact, put aside, as of small consequence compared with some question of politics, or some other matter of present business or amusement.

For these reasons, I say, it is of great consequence for serious minds, I mean for all persons who really believe in the truth of Christ's gospel, to withdraw their thoughts frequently from these temporary trifles, to raise them to high and heavenly realities; especially to the thought of that innumerable society of good angels, who, day and night, sing on high their hallelujahs before the throne, and never rest. And the more we cherish these happy thoughts, the more we shall, by the aid of God's blessed Spirit, become like those exalted inhabitants of Heaven; and, in the end, through the blood and mediation of our Redeemer, we shall be even accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, and shall be indeed, and for ever, the children of God, equal unto the angels.

That this may be our lot and portion at the end of the days of this our earthly trial, may he grant, our adorable, compassionate, heavenly Father, to whom, with the Lord Jesus Christ, and the sacred Spirit, one God blessed for evermore, be ascribed all honor, glory, and adoration, by men and angels, for ever and ever.

AMEN.

## SERMON XIX.

## CHRIST'S LAMENTATION OVER JERUSALEM.

ST. LUKE XIX. 41, 42.

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying: If thou hadst known, even thou—at least in this thy day—the things which belong unto thy peace—but now they are hid from thine eyes!”

THIS most memorable and affecting passage of our Lord's history, must suggest to the thoughtful mind so many considerations of the deepest interest, that it is difficult to select one as more than others suited to afford us instruction, edification, and comfort.

However, as no one can deny that the chief use of Scripture knowledge in general is, that we may apply it to our own particular case, so in this instance it may be well for us, and especially suitable at this holy season,\* to inquire into some at least of the various respects in which the Savior's lamentation over apostate Jerusalem, seems but too applicable to ourselves. For as when the holy Jesus groaned and wept at the grave of him, whom in his unspeakable condescension he called “his friend,” Lazarus, we may well suppose the tears he then shed were at the thought of the little effect all that he had done and was about to do, would have on the obdurate hearts of the children of men; so, when from the Mount of Olives he beheld the city of Jerusalem and wept over it, the grief he felt was not at the thought of the bitter sufferings he was so soon to undergo in that very place, but at the obstinacy and blindness of God's chosen people, and the terrible

\* Lent.

destruction to which that obstinacy and blindness would too surely bring them.

“If thou hadst known, even thou”—God’s elect chosen peculiar people—if not sooner “at least in this thy day”—this thy last space of trial and repentance—if thou wouldst but know, in this thy eleventh hour, “the things which belong unto thy peace—but now they are hid from thine eyes!”

And here let me take occasion to urge on your thoughts, what seems certainly of great importance for us to bear in mind, in order to our right understanding of scripture warnings, as well those contained in the Old Testament as in the New—that under the name and type of “Jerusalem” the Holy Spirit in numberless instances has prefigured to us the condition (whether good or evil) of the Christian church, in the latter days—that is to say (and it is a point which chiefly concerns us), in the very times in which we live.

The subject is one of great magnitude and interest, and might be illustrated by many passages, especially from Isaiah and Jeremiah; but at present I only just touch upon it with a view to impress on thoughtful minds the solemn consideration, that when our blessed Lord beheld Jerusalem and wept over it, it is *to us* in the way of a prophecy, as if it were written that when he beheld his church in this country or in this parish, he wept over it—saying, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day—the things which belong unto thy peace!”

I have occasionally offered to your thoughts some reflections on the cruel unfeeling manner in which most grown-up people treat children and young persons, I mean, with reference to their spiritual and everlasting condition—for with respect to worldly matters, I do not say that the charge would hold good: but as to what is beyond the grave, if it be true what a *very* wise and good man has observed, that “the majority of men grow more profligate and corrupt with age”—then there is no question but that if children and young persons wish to have God for their friend, and to go to

heaven, they must have a different rule to go by than the example which their elders for the most part set them.

Of this, alas! it were too easy to multiply proofs and illustrations. But I now only observe generally, that when our Lord and Master wept over Jerusalem, and bewailed the blindness and obduracy of that apostate city, it was for the sins of the people, and the iniquities of the priests (as the prophet says), the aged and influential persons, that the heavy indignation of God was denounced against them.

With respect to the children of Jerusalem, that they in a manner kept alive the almost expiring flame of devotion in that self-righteous city and people, we are taught by an account which the evangelist gives of an incident which took place there very shortly before our Savior's last sufferings, and the same day as it seems with that on which he had beheld the city and wept over it. "When the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David—they were sore displeased, and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea: have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"

And doubtless it is the same with us now; were it not for children, the very face and form of religion would fast fade away from among us—"if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." God's houses first forsaken, then fallen to decay, and at length laid even with the ground, would bear testimony to the faithlessness, the cowardice, and the practical infidelity of the grown-up persons of this generation. Of this there is one great evidence, well known to persons who observe what is going on, and cannot but perceive what course things are taking—a course, as has been truly asserted, tending to rob God of his glory, and the poor of their most sacred rights.

But to descend from these general to more particular and personal considerations, is it not too certain and

unquestionable, that great numbers of individual Christians refuse to know, in this their day of trial, the things which belong unto their peace, till at length, in God's just judgment, they are hid from their eyes?

When young persons just entering on the world (as we say), have the opportunity given them of consecrating the prime of their days to the honor of their Lord and Master, and of making a choice which shall prove a blessing to them even through eternity; how often, alas! do they, encouraged by the evil example of their elders, show themselves at once ashamed of Christ crucified in an evil and adulterous generation.

Whatever may be pretended, this is the real cause why, for instance, first, confirmation is so neglected, and then their Lord's holy table.

For neglect of both these essentials of church communion, various objections and excuses may be pleaded; but there is, as I said, one root and foundation on which such conduct, however plausibly defended, certainly rests, viz. this—that people are ashamed of Jesus Christ.

Yet he, our omniscient Savior, in his tenderness and compassion, weeps, as it were, over the lambs of his flock, and seeks all ways of leading them to know, at least in that their day of youth and comparative innocence, the things which belong unto their peace. But they too often take no heed to the yearnings of the great Shepherd over them; but following for the most part the evil example of their elders, become first thoughtless, and then hard-hearted, yet all the while retaining a sort of half religion, enough at least to quiet the upbraidings of an uneasy conscience.

At length, the things which belong unto their peace are for ever hid from their eyes.

It may, perhaps, be invidious, in times like these, to mention as blessings and privileges, the being allowed and permitted to enter into God's consecrated houses, I mean churches; to be permitted to use a book of common prayer, breathing the very spirit of primitive Christianity; to be ministered to by presbyters duly

ordained by bishops, and those bishops deriving their spiritual authority by unbroken certain succession from the very apostles; to have unceasing invitations to the communion feast of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, and as unceasing opportunities of attending there;—lastly, to be permitted to spend the Lord's day, and sometimes, perhaps, other holydays, in happy thoughts and humble anticipations of the eternal Sabbath: that we are permitted and allowed thus to be in some faint degree, what true church people ought to be, is doubtless a great blessing and privilege.

And if we did but know in these respects, as in others, even we, at least in this our day, the things which belong unto our peace; but now they are hid from our eyes—from the eyes of most of us, alas! too plainly and unquestionably.

And beside these warnings of mercy, so generally unheeded and even scorned, how plainly do the Lord's chastisements put us in mind, while yet it is called to-day, to seek after and know the things which belong unto our peace. When afflictions are in prospect, whether national, domestic, or personal! first, it is a favor to have the prospect set before us, to be warned of what we have reason to expect. This, I say, is a favor and a mercy, and so must be confessed, unless any will say that it is better for one's ruin to come suddenly and at an instant, or, that a sudden death is to be prayed for by persons living as the most of us are.

But whether regarded so or not, the approach of severe trials should lead us to search after and know, in this our day, the things which belong to our everlasting peace.

When the old landmarks which our fathers set are to be violently torn away—when God's church is to be violently overthrown, so far as a nation can overthrow it—when the ears of the nation, as such, are to be virtually closed against the cries of the poor, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—and when we are told that it is injudicious and impolitic, and I know not what, to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked (though God's

word itself has assured us that the poor never *shall* cease out of the land), I say, when men are now, under pretence even of religion, getting wiser than Christianity; and with the gospel in their mouths, setting aside the very first principles of all that is right and good—then, I say, it is the time for us all, be our station in life what it may, calmly and resolutely to protest against these ungodly, unfeeling proceedings, but chiefly to turn our thoughts and affections to higher and nobler objects, the things which belong to our everlasting peace.

So also under the pressure of family cares and afflictions, with the anticipation, perhaps, of more severe trials of this kind approaching, the sincere Christian girds up his loins, and hopes to the end (as St. Peter says), considers this as his trial day, as the furnace of affliction, from which, if he comes out tried and purified, he shall be in God's sight as gold, fit to be placed among the jewels of the Lord.

And in like manner he judges of bodily sufferings, pain, sickness, desolation, or oppression.

In all these cases striving and praying to be enabled to attain to the true wisdom, the knowledge of the things which belong to his eternal peace; and with this hope bearing up patiently against whatever is cast on him, fully convinced, that, be the load ever so heavy, it is never more than he deserves, nor so much.

Far different and far more to be deplored, is the condition of those who refuse, in this their day, to know the things which belong unto their peace. The chastisements of the Lord have been inflicted on them, but in vain; they refused to amend; they might be startled, perhaps, a little at the time, but there is no lasting repentance.

Such persons, if they could be by any means led to give attention, the Christian pastor might thus address:—Do you consider what warnings you have had, and how you have neglected them—and that if you still persist in so doing, God's mercies may be for ever withdrawn, the light of his countenance for ever hid from your eyes?



Can you doubt for a moment that Jesus Christ, your God and Savior, loves you, and watches over you, and is ever making intercession for your pardon; but you will not come to him to be pardoned?

Can you doubt that the distresses and perplexities which in various ways encompass us both nationally and individually—that these are intended as merciful chastisements to us all, and to you among the rest, to make you know and feel both what you are, and what you ought to be?

And do you not suppose, that if you continue thus to refuse to know, even you, in this your day, the things which belong unto your peace, that they will, speedily and suddenly, be for ever hid from your eyes?

In this way might the Christian pastor address too many of his flock, going on in open deliberate sins—leaving undone what they ought to do, or doing what they ought not.

But experience proves too well that such warnings would be ineffectual, at least so far as human understanding can judge. However, it is our duty to press these sort of considerations on men's consciences; not merely now and then, but habitually and unceasingly. Good resolutions are soon made, and as soon, alas! forgotten—hence the necessity of urging these great points of Christian duty without intermission, that, as the waters wear the stones, so the gentle dew of God's blessed Spirit may, if it please him, soften by degrees the callousness of men's hearts, and open a way to holier and happier impressions.

In the mean time there is no other alternative for us, unless we are willing practically to forsake Jesus Christ; there is, I say, no other alternative for us—but to bear calmly and patiently whatever is laid on us by our heavenly Father—and even if we should be in a manner consumed by the means of his heavy hand, yet be ready to add, with the psalmist, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and with thine ears consider my calling; hold not thy peace at my tears."

And he who wept over apostate Jerusalem, will be

sure to regard the tears of his own elect, that is, all faithful repentant Christians; and as they, in their day of affliction, have sought out and known the things which belong unto their peace, so may they console themselves with the sweet assurance, that if they so continue to the end, faithful and repentant, come what will on them of earthly sorrow and suffering, the mercies of God in Christ Jesus shall be to them steadfast and immoveable, and shall never be "hid from their eyes."

## SERMON XX.

## GOD'S JUDGMENTS ON HIS CHURCH.

JEREMIAH. vii. 12.

"But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people, Israel."

THERE is, as it may seem, no part of the gospel history more worthy of the consideration of thoughtful persons, especially in times of trial, doubt, and perplexity, than what we are told of the circumstances attending our blessed Lord's last visit to the city of Jerusalem; as we find those circumstances detailed in the twenty-first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, and the eleventh of St. Mark's. . . . . The sacred history intimates that the day was far spent when he first came in, and that he had then only time to enter into the temple, and to "look round about upon all things." He beheld, doubtless with sorrow and indignation, the irreverence and profaneness, now almost grown into a system, with which the Lord's chosen house was treated by the Lord's chosen people. It does not however appear that, on that evening, he expressed his displeasure, either by word or action; but, as night came on, and the multitude who had accompanied him was dispersed, he returned again with the twelve to Bethany, their lodging-place.

The next morning (early, St. Luke says), he came again into the city, having by the way, in the withering up of the fig-tree (at once a miracle, a parable, and a prophecy), given his disciples occasion for reflection on what his meaning might be, in working a wonder so unusual with him in its kind; and also put them in the way

to perceive the force of the solemn warning implied in what (as soon as he came to the temple) he proceeded at once to accomplish. For, as the history tells us, as soon as he came into the city, he went into the temple and began to—that is, spent much time and labor in—“ casting out them that were buying and selling in the temple ; and he overthrew the tables or desks of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves. And would not suffer that any man should even carry any vessel through the temple.” And then he began, at length, “ to teach the people,” to tell them the meaning of what he had done ; turning their attention especially to two passages in the ancient Scriptures, the one in the prophet Isaiah, the fifty-sixth chapter. “ My house shall be called an house of prayer for all people ;” the other in the prophet Jeremiah, the seventh chapter, “ Is this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes ? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord.” So leading on the thoughts, at least of reflecting persons then present, especially those who saw the fig-tree that morning dried up from the roots, to what follows : “ But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel.”

At the time when (six hundred years before) the holy prophet Jeremiah was commissioned to deliver these solemn words of warning to the Jews, their condition, in all respects, was most miserable. They had sinned against the Lord, and their sin was just finding them out ; yet they did not ever the more turn to him, with repentance of heart and amendment of life.

They had had the blessing, for thirty years, of the example of their good king Josiah ; but notwithstanding their external shows of respect for him, as a nation, they were far more disposed to pursue the wicked track marked out before by his grandfather Manasseh, and subsequently followed up by his own two sons, who, after him, were kings in succession, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim ; of both of whom it is testified, that “ they did evil in the

sight of the Lord, according to all that their (not their father, but their) fathers had done."

Of the corrupt state of God's people at that time we need seek no farther evidence than that of the holy Jeremiah, in this very chapter, where the Holy Spirit, in describing the conduct of the Jews, seems (as it were) to set forth before all generations of men, and especially before Christians, the fatal nature of that hypocrisy which leads people to suppose that the mere possession of divine privileges will secure them the divine favor, without correspondent holiness of heart and life.

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, stand in the gate of the Lord's house"—that is, the temple at Jerusalem—"and proclaim there this word, and say,

"Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways, and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place"—that is, ye shall not be carried captive. "Trust ye not in lying words"—that is, believe not the assurances of your popular teachers, men of the world, who encourage you by saying there is no danger, God will never cast off his chosen: "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these."—"Ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not, and come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name: and say, or imagine, we are not delivered to do all these abominations;" our privileges will protect us, though our conduct be ever so unsuitable to them? "Is this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold; even I have seen it, saith the Lord.

"But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." And from that example learn to fear for yourselves.

Within twelve years from the time in which this warning was given, came the army of the king of Babylon, and besieged the city, till, from want of food, they were forced to surrender. The king of Judah was taken and brought before the king of Babylon, who gave judgment against him. His sons were slain before his eyes, then himself was cruelly made blind, bound with fetters of brass, and carried to Babylon. The house of the Lord was burnt, also the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem. Thus, says the sacred history, Judah was carried away captive out of his own land, and thus was fulfilled the fearful threatening denounced by the all-merciful Jehovah himself against his rebellious people. "Now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early, and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh; and I will cast you out of my sight." And then presently turning his address to the prophet himself, "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me, for I will not hear thee."

Thus did God speak of and to his elect, chosen people. But to perceive the force of the divine warning, "Go to my place which was in Shiloh, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people," we must somewhat look back into the more ancient history of the Jews.

You may observe, then, that after the children of Israel came under God's miraculous guidance into the land of Canaan, a long space, even four hundred and fifty years, elapsed before a temple was built for the reception of the holy ark, the symbol of the divine presence. During the first portion of this long period, the sacred tabernacle, as we find in the eighteenth of Joshua, was set up at a place called Shiloh, near to the centre of the kingdom, which was as it were the first Jerusalem, or city of peace, and of which it may be remarked, that

it had the very same name with that which the patriarch Jacob on his death-bed has assigned to the future Messiah—"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until *Shiloh* come."

In this favored town or village of Shiloh, in Joshua's tribe, that of Ephraim, the holy tabernacle, or house of God, was for about three hundred years or more, that is, from the time of Joshua to that of Samuel. Of this most distinguished prophet and man of God, the sacred history informs us, that he was brought up even from his childhood in the temple, namely, the tabernacle in Shiloh, where the two wicked sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were officiating as priests.

I need not remind you how God warned the aged Eli of the terrible consequences of his sons' wickedness, first, by a prophet, and then by the child Samuel: nor how soon the divine vengeance was accomplished. All this is stated in the early chapters of the first book of Samuel, and is familiarly known to persons who pay attention to Scripture history. The Israelites, having been defeated by their enemies the Philistines, sent out the ark of God to the field of battle, thinking that so they should ensure themselves victory, but (like Samson) they knew not that the Lord was departed from them. No less than thirty thousand were slain, and the ark of God was taken (as it were) captive, and carried into the land of the enemy, never more to return to Shiloh.

No particulars are given in that history of what befel the place; but its utter desolation is very pathetically referred to in more than one passage of the prophets. For instance, in the seventy-eighth psalm, where we read,

"They tempted and provoked the Most High God  
And kept not his testimonies."  
"When God heard this he was wroth,  
And greatly abhorred Israel.  
So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh,  
The tent which he placed among men.  
He gave his people over also unto the sword,  
And was wroth with his inheritance."

And many years afterward, when the prophet Jeremiah, full of holy zeal for his God, earnestly called his countrymen to true repentance, he was directed by the sacred Spirit, as we before observed, to direct the consideration of those who would consider, to the example of Shiloh, thereby to bring down all vain confidence, which they might have cherished on account of their peculiar privileges—"Trust ye not in lying words, in false confidences—Go to my place which was in Shiloh, and see what I did to it—how her house was literally left unto her desolate—the tabernacle destitute of the ark—Ichabod, the glory departed—for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not, and I called you but ye answered not; therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh"—"and I will cast you out of my sight."

How unpleasant this doctrine was to the priests and to the people generally, we find in the twenty-sixth chapter of this same prophet. It there appears, that Jeremiah by the divine direction stood in the court of the Lord's house, that is, the temple of Jerusalem, and said, "Thus saith the Lord, if ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law which I have set before you—to hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early and sending them: but ye have not hearkened—then will I make this house like Shiloh."

"Whereupon" (the sacred history says) "the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant?" And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah."

To whom his answer was as follows:—

"The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city, all the words that ye have heard.



Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God—and the Lord will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold I am in your hand; do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof, for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.”

And now may not the authorized ministers of the gospel in this country at this day, say like the prophet of old—“Of a truth, the Lord hath sent us unto you to speak all these words in your ears?” Does not the warning apply to the professed members and ministers of Christ’s church in England—“Go ye to my place which was in Shiloh, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.”

These, I say, are questions well deserving the consideration of serious persons.

The time was, when the space enclosed by these walls, the place whereon we now are, was not holy ground; when the inhabitants of this land, in ignorance of the one true God, worshipped the works of their own hands, or perhaps the sun, moon, and planets—or, as it is said, the earth itself—but however with no sense of the divine superintendence over them, as having no hope, so without God in the world.

At length when the light of the gospel shone throughout the land, and was after a time welcomed by men of all orders, from the highest to the lowest, the first thing done almost, when things came to be somewhat settled, was to form parishes and build a church in each; a church, that is, a holy house of God wherein the Christian or sojourners (for that is the proper meaning of the word parishioners, Christian *strangers* and *pilgrims*) should assemble for the due celebration of the Lord’s service—especially for prayer, for the administration of baptism, and chiefly for receiving from the hands of the bishop of the diocese or presbyter of the parish, the

blessed seal of pardon and sanctification in the communion of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. While for some little space round the sacred walls of the church the ground was also consecrated to be a cemetery, that is, a sleeping or resting-place for the bodies of departed Christians till the day of the last resurrection. Thus provision was made (as one may say) by the whole nation, for (as I said before) all ranks and orders joined in it, for the due celebration of the worship and service of the Lord Jesus, and also for continuing his holy establishment (if one may so use the word) on from generation to generation.

But by degrees corruptions crept in and increased; corruptions, too many of them sanctioned and cherished by the church of Rome, which for many years exercised its tyrannical usurped power over this church and kingdom.

At length these corruptions became so intolerable, that, whether from good or bad motives, the rulers of the land, supported by the people, resolved to shake off the Roman yoke which had pressed so heavily on the necks of our forefathers—and so took place what is called the reformation.

Since that time, now about three hundred years, that is, about the space for which the ark of God was at Shiloh—the condition of the English church externally has been indeed very varied; this variation chiefly perhaps owing to the endeavors which statesmen have constantly been making to render the church a mere instrument for political purposes.

And these endeavors have proved, alas! but too successful. Nevertheless, whatever may be the outward circumstances of the church in this land, it has at least preserved all the essentials of pure Christianity, in the Bible, the Prayer-book, the acknowledgment of the exclusive authority of the bishops and presbyters, and the laying down rules and directions for all the parts and duties of a Christian life—so that I may venture at least to say thus much, that there is no condition of joy or sorrow, of doubt or perplexity, in which the church

has not provided for the direction and guidance of her sons.

I do not say what is regarded, but what might and ought to be so.

Now, then, things have gone on so long, that is, one may say, three hundred years in this way, that people who do not reflect, take for granted that it will last for ever. "But go now to my house which was in Shiloh, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." In Shiloh the ark rested for three hundred years. Then, when it was least expected, it was delivered into the hands of the enemies, and the tabernacle of the Lord was left desolate. The Jews formerly said (as the prophet testifies)—"The temple of the Lord—the temple of the Lord—the temple of the Lord." Just as people now talk about the church—the church—the church; and yet, very often, what are their lives? A very disgrace to any religion whatever. No person who leads an unholy life can be a true churchman, be his professions ever so loud and confident. But what is an unholy life? Surely any course of conduct inconsistent with the strict rules of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If this be the case, what can people say for themselves, either as Christians or as churchmen? What result can we expect that the present state of things must soon come to, or rather, I should say, what *has* it come to? For, indeed, it is evident to all judicious persons that (externally) there is but the shadow of a church remaining to us.

And, internally, it is equally evident that the best account which can be given of us—of the great majority of professed church people, is nothing better than that dictated by the great Shepherd himself, concerning a bishop of the primitive church. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." This is the best account to be given of us.

Under such circumstances it becomes an important question, how the sincere member of the church, in

times so trying, should conduct himself so as not to fall into the condemnation pronounced against the lukewarm, half Christian.

But this would lead us into an inquiry, of which the present time will not allow.

I will only say, that the subject is not a fanciful one, but one of solid practical importance—at least if it be of importance to us to know whether or not we are true members of Christ's spiritual body, and whether our life and practice be such as will (not satisfy other people or ourselves, that possibly they may do; but whether they are such as will) evince us, in the last day of account, to have been (however imperfect yet) sincere, loving, and zealous disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## SERMON XXI.

## FEARLESSNESS UNDER GOD'S JUDGMENTS.

JER. xxxvi. 24.

“ Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words.”

PERHAPS one may venture to say, that there is no part of the Old Testament more worthy of the careful attention of all serious persons, than that which relates to the history of the Jews, during the period from the death of King Solomon to the Babylonish captivity—being a space of about three hundred and seventy years.

For immediately after Solomon's death, that great revolution took place, when, owing to the folly of his son and successor Rehoboam, together with the pride of the people engendered by long prosperity, ten tribes revolted, and established for themselves a separate kingdom under Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Two tribes only remained faithful to their lawful sovereign.

Thus were there two rival kingdoms—Israel containing ten tribes, and Judah only two, constantly (as might be expected) at variance with each other, and so taken up with worldly politics, as to become, as time went on, more and more estranged from the pure worship of Jehovah their God. Of these two kingdoms Israel was the worst—a fact not difficult to account for, as from other causes so from this, that Jerusalem and its holy temple being within the kingdom of Judah, it was always an object with the kings of Israel to restrain their subjects from going thither to worship. They therefore erected and encouraged, what one may call, schismatical places of worship (or as they are called

in the book of Amos, chapels), in two parts of their dominions, namely, Bethel in the south, and Dan in the north, as much more convenient, and making of the lowest of the people priests of the high places, they effectually loosened in men's minds all practical regard—first to the ordinances of Jehovah, and then to Jehovah himself. Thus the kingdom of Israel grew corrupt very rapidly, and by God's just judgments was carried captive into Assyria, never more to be restored, after they had subsisted as a distinct nation, from Jeroboam the the first king to Hosea the last king, about two hundred and fifty-four years. But Judah was allowed to remain another century in all (as I said), three hundred and seventy years, and then the measure of her iniquity also being filled up, she was carried captive to Babylon, for an appointed term of seventy years, the city and temple being destroyed, and the whole land laid utterly desolate.

Just as this eventful crisis was coming on, the wicked Jehoiakim being then king of Judah, this word came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, "Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." See here the infinite mercy of our heavenly Father, how does he declare himself ready to change his purposes of punishment, if we will but return from our evil way.

All these warnings, Jeremiah, being "shut up," could not deliver to the people. Whereupon he directed his faithful scribe Baruch to execute the commission for him.

"Go thou (said he), and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the Lord, in the ears of the people, in the Lord's house, upon the fasting-day."—"It may be they will present their sup-

plication before the Lord, and will return every one from his evil way : for great is the anger and the fury that the Lord hath pronounced against this people." Baruch accordingly did as Jeremiah commanded him, both then and (as it appears) the next year after. For in the first verse of this chapter compared with the eighth, it is mentioned that it was the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim, when the writing of the roll and first reading of it took place. And then again from the ninth verse it appears in the *fifth* year, in the ninth month, a solemn fast being proclaimed for all Judah, Baruch took the opportunity to read once more the solemn threatenings denounced by Jeremiah, before all the people, as they stood in the great court of the temple.

Of his having done this, word was brought to the king's chief counsellors of state, mentioned by name at the twelfth verse—and they immediately sent to Baruch, desiring him to bring the roll, and let them hear it also. "And it came to pass (the history says), when they had heard all the words," that is, the threatenings denounced against Judah and Jerusalem, "they were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch, we will surely tell the king of all these words." Being themselves (for the time at least) deeply affected, they thought it their duty to let the king know all the circumstances; at the same time, being aware of his cruel disposition, they advised Baruch and Jeremiah to conceal themselves. They went in to the king into the court, not however taking the roll with them—perhaps apprehensive that he might injure or destroy it, but they told all the words in the ears of the king; "all the words," that is, the purport of all the prophecies. So the king sent a person to fetch the roll, probably even then *intending* to show his bold presumptuous contempt of God and his warnings.

For thus the history proceeds. "The king sat in the winter-house, and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, and though three of his counsellors made intercession to him that he would not burn the roll, he would not hear them, but cut it with

the pen-knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth."

"Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants, that heard all these words."

To all persons, who have on their hearts any serious sense of religious truth, any reverence for the great name of God, any awe of his judgments—such conduct as this must appear both fearful and surprising—surprising, that men should hear such tremendous denunciations of the divine vengeance with indifference, and fearful, at the apprehension of that seven-fold wrath of the Almighty, which must surely await those who so dare to despise and defy him—must await them, I say, if not in this present world, yet certainly in that day, when it will be too late to repent.

Now then, whosoever of you are sincerely anxious to preserve in your hearts a deep and lasting sense of the ineffable majesty of the great Almighty God, and of the terribleness of his judgments against sin and sinners—let me ask you, whether it is not plainly one of the signs of these times, that men are so much disposed, like the wicked Jehoiakim and his servants, to encourage in themselves, and in one another, a spirit of fearless, shameless, unfeeling defiance of our great God and Savior, of his judicial warnings, and his righteous laws: "they will not be afraid, nor rend their garments, though they have heard all these words;" a spirit, surely, in some respects more alarming even than that of pretended infidelity itself. For with the infidel there is at least the *name* of reason, the *profession* of being open to conviction; but for him who allows the truth of God's word, and the sure approach of a day of account, and and yet deliberately lives as if these things were no concern of his—what more can be done? what remedy can be thought of.

If you urge on the thoughts of such an one the terrors denounced in Scripture against those who obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, he will answer that he



is no unbeliever—that he knows all those things as well as any one can tell him. If you proceed, again, to ask how he can know such things and not be afraid, nor look forward with apprehension to the accounting day—he has an answer ready;—that be it as it may, he is not at all afraid; and whatever any one may say, he does not mean to be frightened, but to go on with his present notions or practices just as long as he shall choose.

I think it will be found, on a careful investigation, that this kind of wilful negligence of God's truth, and unconcern about his warnings and threatenings, is extremely prevalent among us at this day—prevalent, let me add, not merely among the openly careless and profligate, but also among great numbers who make pretensions to superior knowledge and piety.

As to persons who lead openly careless irreligious lives, yet without at all professing to be unbelievers (and how fearfully common such cases are, I leave to yourselves to consider), but of persons so living, the greater number probably very seldom feel anything like keen remorse of conscience for their sins, or any painful apprehensions about what their condition shall be in the eternal world. Sometimes possibly a violent illness, or the danger of death from some other cause, or some heavy affliction befalling themselves or their near friends, startles them (as it were) from their forgetful slumber, and leads them to form resolutions of repentance and amendment. But alas! in by far the greater number of instances, such repentance shows itself to be little better than a mere name, a deceitful shadow, “as the morning cloud, or the early dew, that passeth away.”

But, however, many persons go on for years, indeed to old age, without even this temporary awakening, this shadow of repentance and reformation of life.

The world and worldly business occupying all their thoughts and time, except, perhaps, some portion that they assign to be spent in pleasure and recreation—how can there be any room in a heart so occupied, for spirit-

ual recollections, for thoughts of God and his judgments, and preparation for eternity!

Now that they are really ignorant of these great concerns—it has never entered their minds to doubt the truth of the gospel, the inspiration of the Scriptures, or the account they must give for their own works at the tribunal of an omniscient Judge. These things they are not ignorant of—have never doubted of—yet of what value to them has been this knowledge or this confidence, if they have not been thereby led to a due sense of their own danger, and of the infinite mercy of our heavenly Father in showing us a way of escape on the terms of the gospel covenant.

The solemn words of warning and of threatening have been familiar to them—they have constantly been reminded in various ways of the terribleness of God's indignation against sinners, yet "they have not been afraid, nor rent their garments, when they have heard all these words."

No person of the least serious thought and reflection, who contemplates the state of the Christian world, in this country at least—a country, let it be observed, which makes the highest pretensions to knowledge and religion of any country on the face of the earth; yet, I say, no serious person can doubt that sins of impurity—drunkenness, whoredom, fornication, and adultery, do prevail among us to a degree that is, without question, most fearful and appalling.

For however a profligate abandoned world may make light of such crimes, encouraged herein, alas! by those rash presumptuous, enthusiastic views of the religion and gospel of the Lord Jesus, which now so widely prevail; yet of what value can such encouragement be, when set against the awful denunciations of the great God himself in the law, the prophets, and the gospel; but most especially (which ought to be observed) in the gospel. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with sur-

feiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares."

"The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, . . . drunkenness, revellings, and *such like*, of the which I tell you (says St. Paul), that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Yea, will so judge, as appears from the two last chapters of St. John's Revelation, that, without true and timely repentance, they shall "have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone—the second death;" shall be shut out for ever from the holy city—from the beatific presence of God and of the Lamb.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but *these words* shall not pass away." Yet how are they constantly heard and read, without fear or remorse, by persons who have not only been themselves notoriously guilty of these crimes—crimes, I mean, of intemperance and impurity—but who encourage others, in many instances, alas! parents their own children, and elderly people younger ones, to follow in this path of ruin.

To whom may be too correctly applied the words of the prophet in the corrupt days of the Jewish church:—

"Are they ashamed when they have committed abomination? Nay, they are not at all ashamed, neither can they blush?"

And however plain the warnings, however awful the threatenings, denounced in the gospel—*observe in the gospel*—against such sins, yet, like the abandoned Jehoiakim, "they are not afraid;" not startled or alarmed, not abashed or confounded, "when they hear all these words."

Or again, is it not plainly required of all persons to whom God has vouchsafed the divine gift of reason and understanding, and much more of those who call themselves by the great name of Christians, to follow after truth, peace, unity, and submission to authority, avoiding all hypocrisy, pride, discord, and self-confidence, as

those dispositions by which the great enemy of men's souls labors most effectually to alienate us from God and his faithful service ?

Yet now it is certainly what no person of observation can deny or question, that a deep anxiety for the truth, an earnest practical endeavor to avoid separations, disputes, and divisions, a spirit of dutiful and lowly submission to authority, these are not the dispositions surely which in these days are most valued, most cherished and honored, even by those multitudes who make high pretensions to religion, much less by others.

The Scripture, indeed, that holy word of the Almighty, by which we know we are to be judged at the last day, has plainly warned us, that we ought to "love the truth and peace"—that those who "receive not the love of the truth," are in danger of "perishing"—that "the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable"—that "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints"—that "we should obey them that have the rule over us, and submit ourselves"—that "in the last days perilous times shall come ; times when men (that is Christians, by professions) shall not endure sound doctrine, but after their own fancies shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, (O the wonderful accuracy of this prophecy!) and shall turn away their ears from the truth"—that we ought to "mark (that is, observe) those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the apostolic doctrine, and avoid them," remembering that, as St. Paul asserts, "such persons serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, as they imagine or pretend ; but their own feelings and fancies (for that seems to be the meaning of the expression in the original), and by good words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple."

Can any one deny that these are the plain warnings and admonitions of Scripture ? and if so, ought they not to be attended to by all who profess to be guided by Scripture ?

And yet *are* they attended to in these days of what is called superior light and knowledge ; though more

truly (it is to be feared) worthy to be accounted days of increasing apostacy, darkness, and confusion ?

Rather, we may ask, is it not certain, is it not what will be allowed by persons of observation, experience, and impartiality, that it is in vain, or almost in vain, to attempt to persuade the generality of Christians in this country, at this time, to consider the love of truth, peace, humility, and obedience to authority, as essential gospel duties. To urge them, is to raise a smile of pity, not to say of scorn. Like the hardened king of Judah, in the text, Christians are "not afraid, nor rend their garments, when they hear all these words:" all these solemn warnings against pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy, false doctrine, heresy, and schism.

Under circumstances so trying, it seems a plain duty of Christ's authorized ministers to keep on putting people in mind—whether any regard be paid to our advice or no—that confident feelings are no evidence whatever of spiritual safety—that the uniform voice of Scripture, and not popular opinion, must be our guide in matters of truth and duty—that sins of intemperance and impurity are not the less sins for being common, nor for their being boldly and shamefully avowed among all ranks of people—that covetousness and the love of this world are inconsistent with the love of Christ Jesus, and the sincere profession of the gospel: however the covetous and the worldly may slight the warning, these, and such as these, seem to be the *kind* of admonition we are bound to offer in these days, when the danger to men's souls is more than ever great though few seem to be aware of it.

And, therefore, because they are not aware, they think such admonitions needless and impertinent.

Yet, believe me, the persecution that is at this moment raging against the truth of God and his blessed gospel, is worse than the persecution of the sword; worse, as being more ensnaring to men's souls, under specious names and pretences drawing them off from "the truth as it is in Jesus:" worse, too, because it is so difficult to point out exactly where the danger lies, especially

when so many, alas! refuse to believe that there is any danger at all.

For these reasons let us advise you, let us implore you all, especially young persons, whose hearts are not yet hardened, nor your principles corrupted by long intercourse with a treacherous world—let us, I say, implore you, to reflect seriously on the great danger you are in of learning to think lightly of religious truth—of using yourselves to hear the warnings of the Almighty without regard, and to witnessing his judgments without fear or alarm.

Rather, you will do well earnestly to seize every opportunity of applying such warnings and judgments to your own case, to the improvement of your own hearts and lives, that so the merciful intentions of your heavenly Father, for your eternal good, may not be frustrated and made void.

For such endeavors, by the all-sufficient aid of the blessed Spirit, will not be in vain; and though the world may pity, scorn, or persecute us, yet the world is not our master, we owe it no service, no allegiance: only let our care be so to live, that in every trial the Lord Jesus may be on our side, and then we need not fear what man can do unto us.

## SERMON XXII.

## THE FIDELITY OF ABRAHAM.

ST. JAMES ii. 21-23.

“ Was not Abraham our father justified by works,  
 When he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?  
 Seest thou, how faith wrought with his works,  
 And by works was faith made perfect?  
 And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith,  
 Abraham believed God,  
 And it was imputed unto him for righteousness:  
 And he was called, The friend of God.”

It was only about one hundred years after the Almighty had displayed “ the power of his wrath” against sin, by the destruction of this beautiful world by a deluge of water, that mankind again grew corrupt, and proved the faithlessness and pride that reigned in their hearts, by setting about building them “ a city and tower whose top should reach unto heaven.”

Upon this followed the remarkable judgment of the confusion of languages. So that people could no longer associate together as belonging to one family or nation, but were obliged to separate one from another—“ were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth.” Still it does not appear that in this their dispersion they carried with them any lasting recollection of the divine judgments, but like their fathers before the flood, “ corrupted their way upon the earth.”

It was not, however, long before the hand of God again interfered, in a less decisive manner indeed than on former occasions, but to all thoughtful persons displaying not less authoritatively than in the flood, and the confusion of tongues, his eternal hatred of sin, and love of righteousness and truth.

For it was only three hundred and twenty-six years

after the dispersion, and therefore only about four hundred and twenty-six years after the flood, and before the death of Shem, the son of Noah (which is much to be observed), that the Almighty selected one individual, as the instrument of his dispensations, one through whom he would condescend to make known his will to mankind ; in short, a chosen vessel unto him to bear his name before all the nations of the world, in every age : and in whom they should all be blessed.

That this illustrious person was selected out of all the then inhabitants of the world, *on account of* the faith, humility, resignation, zeal, and love of God, and other heavenly graces which peculiarly shone forth in him even before God called him to be a special instrument of his providence, we can hardly doubt, when we call to mind these and other passages of Scripture relating to the subject.

St. Stephen says (Acts vii.), "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee ; then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans."—And in the twenty-fourth chapter of Joshua, we have this account of the same memorable event : "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood, in old time—(*the flood*, that is, the river Euphrates, called by the people of those countries "the great river")—even Terah the father of Abraham, the father of Nahor ; and they served other gods ; and I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan."

On comparing these passages together, it seems evident that while the Chaldeans in general, and among them Abraham's father and kindred, had fallen into idolatrous worship, he himself *from the first* had remained faithful to Jehovah, the true and only God.

In Isaiah (the forty-first chapter), the Jewish church is thus reminded of God's dealings with Abraham their father and founder. "Who raised up *the righteous man*



from the East, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings?"—Here the emphatic expression "the righteous man" (or, as it is in the original, "righteousness"), seems evidently intended to point out that Abraham was selected as one faithful among many unfaithful.

And in the same prophet (the fifty-first chapter), the example of Abraham is thus held forth to devout Israelites—"Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged: look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for *I called him alone*, and blessed him and increased him." Here the expression "I called him alone" seems to show that Abraham had been as it were "alone," in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, and that for his singular faithfulness he was so "called" of God.

Indeed, the testimony of the Almighty himself is decisive on the point, as we find it in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis.

"The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him: *for I know him*, that he will command his children and his household after him: and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."

These and other passages seem plainly to show that this illustrious man was selected out of all the then inhabitants of the world to be the instrument of the divine dispensations; selected, I say, not from mere arbitrary choice, or for some hidden reason, but because he was eminently good and holy—self-denying and resigned.

The whole nation of the Jews indeed were a chosen people, but then it was for Abraham's sake, not for their own, that they were so privileged, as they were often reminded by their prophets; nay, we find (in the twenty-sixth chapter of Genesis) that the special favor shown even to Isaac was for Abraham his father's sake. "I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven,

and will unto thy seed all these countries, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, *because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.*"

Abraham then having been selected, by "God who knoweth the hearts," out of the midst of a corrupted world, as the instrument and channel (as it were) of the divine dispensations to that world, was found also (which is quite a separate consideration), when put to the trial, to maintain through a long life that same holy and devoted resignation to the divine will, that resolute self-denial in God's cause, which then, and in every age, have been the true test of a living faith.

For from the time when he left his home, and "went out not knowing whither he went," to the last hour of his life, comprising a space of not less than one hundred years, he was constantly subject to trials and sufferings of various kinds; by his behavior under which the sincerity of his faith was fully proved, and like the holy men before him, Enoch and Noah, "he had this testimony, that he pleased God."

As to the trials which befell Abraham, all persons who have attended to the Scripture history are well aware what they were. But it will be well just to call to mind the chief of them, as they occurred during the fifty years after his departure out of Haran, as we find in Gen. xii., and the following chapters.

This departure itself into an unknown land—the wickedness of the Canaanites among whom he was placed—the famine which compelled him to go down into Egypt—his anxiety while there about Sarah his beloved wife—(an anxiety which perhaps proved in this one instance too strong for his faith)—the trouble he had with Lot, whom he had treated as a son—his being so long childless, with no hope of an heir to his wealth—the covenant of circumcision with all its circumstances—the promise of a son in his extreme old age—his anxiety again about Lot, in the threatened vengeance against Sodom and Gomorrah—and again, too, about Sarah in Gerar—his domestic troubles about Hagar and Ish-

mael ;—all these may be taken as *instances* of the various sorts of trials which he who was honored with the title of “The friend of God,” had to endure, and by which, when proved, he was so far found faithful. But now, after this fifty years of probation, there remained a heavier trial still—one which, if he endured it as he had done the former, would prove beyond all doubt that he had indeed, not in profession only, given his heart to his God. For thus we find it.

“It came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham,” that is, put his faith once more to the trial—in this way.

“He said unto him, Abraham ;”

“And he said, Behold, here I am ;” (ready to do or suffer anything) ; “and he said, take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

It may perhaps be imagined, but it would be vain to attempt to describe, what must have been the holy patriarch’s feelings at receiving such an injunction as this.

But God’s will was his, and he set himself in silence, though we may suppose not without many a painful struggle, to fulfil the divine command.

“He rose up early in the morning,” doubtless after a night of prayer, “and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for a burnt-offering, and rose up and went toward the place of which God had told him.”

But the journey was not a short one, for it was “the third day before Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off.” Upon this, doubtless in the true spirit of devout self-denial, and apprehensive lest any hinderance should arise to prevent the fulfilment of God’s mysterious purposes, he would allow no one to be witness of this his heroic resignation of himself to more than martyrdom.

For he commanded the young men to abide there where he first came in sight of Mount Moriah. But

“he took the wood of the burnt-offering (which before had been carried by the slaves), and laid it upon Isaac his son, and *he* took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and they went both of them together.”

Now observe how (what we call) *trying* was every minute circumstance: for instance, “Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father! and he said, Here am I, my son.

“And he said, Behold the fire, and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering. So they went both of them together.

“And they came to the place which God had told him of. And Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order: and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.”

Now let me observe, whatever may be the differences of opinion as to the most edifying way of understanding and applying this wonderfully touching passage of sacred history, it cannot be doubted that the holy patriarch was made the instrument of presenting to mankind in this instance, first of all a wonderful type and foreshowing of the transcendent mercy of Almighty God in the great work of redemption by the blood of his adorable Son; and also it is equally unquestionable that there is provided in this memorable history a pattern of true faith and self-denying resignation, a pattern, I say, for the benefit of all sincere believers in every age. In these two points of view it is quite natural and obvious, that this famous passage should be constantly presented to men's thoughts. And for this reason, doubtless, it is, that the chapter containing it is appointed by the British church to be read on Good Friday, with reference to the great atonement on that day commemorated; and on the first Sunday in Lent, the season when all serious men's thoughts are specially directed to the necessity of self-denial and a thorough resignation of the heart to the disposal of the holy jealous God.

That the thorough self-renouncing martyr-like trust in his heavenly Father, displayed by the patriarch on this occasion, was well-pleasing in God's sight, may appear as from other passages, so from what immediately follows in the history.

"The angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." And afterward, "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because *thou hast done this thing*, and HAST NOT WITHHELD thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; . . . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, *because thou hast obeyed my voice.*"

"Was not" (then asks the eloquent apostle), "Was not Abraham our father justified by works?" did not his conduct show his faith to be solid, substantial, and such as God approves of, "when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" Seest "thou how on the one hand faith wrought with his works, and" on the other "by his works his faith was made perfect," brought to its proper end and effect.

"And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness."

And he was called "The friend of God;" he had the great, the magnificent distinction of being acknowledged by the Almighty Jehovah himself, "Abraham, *my friend.*"

You see then that true faith, such as Abraham the father of the faithful practised, and such as God will accept through the blood and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ—true faith, I say, consists, or (as St. James's word is) "is made perfect" in a self-denying life; or, to speak shortly, self-denial is the real test of faith.

It would be not difficult to confirm and illustrate this

truth by abundant references both to Scripture and to our every day's experience; but for the present I forbear to enter into particulars, and shall only suggest to the consideration of those who are disposed to be considerate, some general reflections out of the many naturally arising from this great subject.

One consideration is, of the life which Abraham led, how far from anything like peace and rest—how unsettled and without a home he was; like the Almighty Savior himself when he dwelt among us, having not where to lay his head, that is, in any place he could call his home.

The patriarch's condition in this respect is very pathetically described in that famous chapter, the eleventh to the Hebrews: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Now they that say such things," that is consider themselves as strangers and pilgrims, "declare plainly that they seek a country," that they are as wanderers and travellers, looking out for a home.

If such then were the case with those holy men of old, men who were honored with God's special favor, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, if they were as strangers and wanderers in this world, and more than this, if the Redeemer himself were, when he was among us, in a manner homeless and friendless—what are we to expect, if we would be faithful servants of God, like those holy patriarchs, if we would be true followers of the meek and suffering Lord Jesus.

As Christians our home must be in heaven now, or heaven will be no home to us at last. In this life we must be content to be nothing better than strangers, sojourners, wanderers, and even outcasts, if God so please, otherwise we are yet strangers to the faith of Abraham.

The other consideration naturally arising from the foregoing is this:—If we are not now in this life like Abraham and the other holy men who have gone before

us, how shall we be fit to join their society in the land of eternal rest ?

This reflection should be often and deeply pressed on the mind, as being of the utmost possible consequence to preserve in us right views of our condition, and a disposition of heart suitable thereto.

To this purpose let me offer to your thoughts the solemn and startling observations of a living writer :—

“ We are apt (he says) to deceive ourselves, and to consider heaven a place like this earth ; I mean a place where every one may choose and take his *own* pleasure. We see that in this world active men have their own enjoyments, and domestic men have theirs ; people of different habits and stations of life have their own respective pursuits and pleasures. Hence we are led to act as if it would be the same in another world. . . . .

“ But the fact is, heaven is *not* revealed to us in Scripture as a place where many different and discordant pursuits can be carried on at once, as is the case in this world.

“ Here every man can do his *own* pleasure ; there, he must do God’s pleasure.

“ It would indeed be presumptuous to attempt to determine the employments of that eternal life which good men are to pass in God’s presence, or to deny that that state which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived, may comprise an infinite variety of pursuits and occupations. Still, we are distinctly told, that that future life will be spent in God’s *presence*, in a sense which does not apply to our present life ; so that it may be best described as an endless, uninterrupted worship of the eternal Father, Son, and Spirit.—‘ They serve him day and night in his temple ; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. . . . . The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.’ . . . . Again ‘ The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.’ . . . .

“ If then it were possible for a man without religion

to be admitted into heaven, doubtless he would sustain a great disappointment—he would find there no pursuits, he would hear there no discourse but what he disliked on earth.

“Heaven is *not* heaven, is not a place of happiness, except to the *holy*.

“For think only what would be the condition of an irreligious unholy person, if he were thrust into the society of saints and angels. How forlorn would he wander through the courts of heaven! he would find no one like himself; he would see in every direction the marks of God’s holiness, and these would make him shudder. He would *feel* himself always in the presence of God. He could no longer turn his thoughts another way, as he now can when conscience reproaches him.

“He would know that the eternal eye was ever upon him; and that eye of holiness, which is joy and life to holy creatures, would seem to him an eye of wrath and punishment. God cannot change his nature; holy he must ever be. But while he is holy, no unholy soul can be happy in heaven.”

Think, then, I beseech you, and reflect on these things, while yet the power of thought and reflection remains to you.

Would you have your eternal portion with miserable wicked men, who have departed this life out of God’s faith and fear, with lost, abandoned, yet immortal spirits, for whom there can be no more mercy, no more hope, no not to all eternity—would you have your portion with these, or with the holy men who have gone before us, prophets, martyrs, and confessors, whose lives, like faithful Abraham’s, were devoted to the love and service of their and our God?

Now the choice is in your power; you know not any moment but it may be withdrawn from you; in any moment we may be cut off, as you very well know.

O then let us be wise betimes—let us earnestly seek after those dispositions, and graces, and habits now, which would suit the blessed spirits in heaven; otherwise we may know for certain that we shall find no ad-



mittance there ; we shall be shut out for ever ; the door once closed will be never again opened ; and the recollection of the precious opportunities we have wasted, the precious time we have mispent, will be among the bitterest of those bitter tortures.

Again then, I say, think of these things and be wise betimes.

For it is no imaginary danger that threatens us, but one real, positive, and tremendous ; one, too, that the great God himself is ever warning us of : and if all shall be found too little to rouse us now, what will be our thoughts when we shall be wakened from our graves by the last trumpet, how shall we dare to meet him who will no longer be our Savior !

## SERMON XXIII.

## THE CHURCH AN UNWELCOME PROPHET.

1 KINGS xxii. 8.

“There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.”

ONE of the portions of sacred history which the church has been most careful to teach all her diligent hearers, by selecting almost the whole of it to be read in the course of her Sunday lessons, is the life and death of Ahab, the worst of the kings of Israel. The reason is, that his crimes and errors, however shocking, were so very natural, so very like what we see and feel every hour among ourselves.

For example, nothing can be more natural or more common, yet surely few things more inexcusable, than the temper expressed in these words: “I hate him, because he doth not prophesy good of me, but evil.” Nothing, I say, can be more natural than this: for who likes to be told of evil to come, and hindered from pursuing favorite schemes, upon which he has long set his heart? especially when, as in this case, his conscience tells him that he deserves no good, and cannot therefore expect God’s blessing. It is no wonder men should shrink from advice which passes so unfavorable a judgment on them, and represents their own condition to themselves and others as beyond measure dangerous and disgraceful. But although this is no *wonder*, it is a very great folly indeed: folly of that inexcusable kind, which is sure in the next world, and almost sure in this, to bring after it the punishment of deliberate wickedness. For how earnestly soever one’s heart may

be set upon this or that thing, who that coolly considers for a moment would not wish to be warned in time, so that if it were really evil for him, he might give up the pursuit of it altogether? Who does not see, in every one, and despise, in every one but himself, the folly and childishness of accounting a man your enemy, because he tells you the truth for your good?

The thing cannot be put in a stronger light than it is by the circumstances of the king of Israel, when he spoke the words in the text. He was just entering on a dangerous war, and he knew well enough, for all his heathenish behavior, that there was only one power in the world that could bring him safe out of it; and that power was God Almighty. But his conscience told him also, but too clearly, that he was in sight of the just and holy being, stained with many of the worst sins, an idolater, a murderer, a corrupter of his people; to which sins he was so deeply besotted, that no warning, he well knew, had any chance of making him repent in earnest. Good reason had he to think, that neither in this war, nor anything else which he should undertake, he was likely to obtain the blessing of God, or to receive an encouraging answer from his prophets, should he ask their advice what to do. Accordingly, instead of going to him who alone was sure to give a true answer, he betakes himself to the miserable shift of asking certain corrupt prophets, who were ready enough to use God's name for any vile purpose of deceiving souls; these he assembles together, and asks them, "Shall I go up to Ramoth-Gilead and prosper?" They answered, as a lying spirit had taught them, "Go up and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." Upon this encouragement, in which it should seem he had himself no real reliance, he makes up his mind to the unspeakable madness of venturing into danger without first trying to make God his friend by sincere repentance. And having still one friend who feared God, when that friend advises him to find out a true prophet of the Lord, and inquire of him also, he betrays his own foolish and wicked heart by those words in the text:

“There is yet one man, by whom we may inquire of the Lord : but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good of me, but evil.” Here then you have a person, wise enough generally in worldly matters (for such undoubtedly king Ahab seems to have been), refusing, in a matter of life and death, and that to be decided in a few days—refusing, I say, so much as to ask advice of the only good adviser he could find, because he suspected the advice would be unpleasant : refusing, as long as he dared, to inquire of the Lord, lest the Lord should dissuade him for his good. And to complete the picture of what people come to who have lived so as to make God their enemy, when he had been shamed into sending for Micaiah, he only raged against him, and totally disregarded his warning. He goes on obstinately into the war, and is killed shamefully in the first battle, leaving a curse upon his whole family.

It requires only reading over, to pass a right judgment on all this. But now let us suppose for a moment, that, as we by the help of Holy Scripture are enabled to look back on the case of Ahab, and wonder at his rash impiety, so Ahab in his turn might have been taught as it were to look onward : suppose that Micaiah or some other prophet, had come to him in the word of the Lord, and told him of a sort of people, who should one day appear in the world, to whom God would reveal for a certainty, what in Ahab’s time men only guessed at ; the doctrine of eternal life or death, heaven or hell, prepared for them hereafter. Suppose Ahab was told of a sort of people, who should hear from the Son of God himself, that a worm which never dies, and a fire which never shall be quenched, is prepared for the wicked ; and that hell, the place where they must go, if they die in their sins, is well worth avoiding at the cost of a right eye plucked out, or a right arm cut off ;—would not Ahab, with much reason, have said, that these things were unspeakably more terrible than what God had threatened to him by Elijah ? his own violent death, dogs licking his blood, and the utter and bloody destruction of his family ? And might he not also have

added truly, that, bad and inexcusable as he might be, men who could despise such warnings, and live entirely for this world, would give a still more frightful proof of their wilful blindness and hatred of good things ?

Suppose he were told all this, and were informed also, that these people, knowing themselves to be in such danger, would most of them hate to be reminded of it ; would, on purpose, get out of the way of everybody and everything which would put them on their guard against it ; would consider themselves greatly affronted and injured, if one should endeavor charitably to open their eyes, and show them how near they have come to it unawares.

Going more into particulars, let us suppose that Ahab could have had also communicated to him, in the same way, by the Spirit of prophecy, the future institution of the Christian ministry, and the manner in which that would be received. Let us suppose that the prophet had said to him, the same divine Person, who shall tell the world clearly what will be the fate of impenitent sinners in another world, will also lay down his life to save them, truly repenting, from it : and having so done, he will rise again, and continue among men for a time ; for this among other purposes, viz., to appoint certain messengers to go out in his name, and teach all nations, and all generations, by themselves or their successors, the bitter consequences of sin unrepented of. And God's good providence will so order things, that there shall never be wanting in after ages persons commissioned to put the world in mind of these great truths : commissioned, I say, by God himself, and bound to him, by the most solemn oath, to rebuke sinners in due season ; to use both public and private admonition, and make every one aware of his danger, as need shall require, and occasion shall be given. So that the fearful tidings of judgment to come, and the good tidings of salvation by the Son of God, shall be brought home to men's own doors, and no soul at the last will be able to plead that it perished for want of "knowing better."

To this account of the Christian ministry, and of the

solemn oath by which Christian pastors are bound, let us suppose the Spirit of prophecy to have added farther some notion of the general fashion of the world's behavior to the messengers of the gospel, such as we see it in our days. Suppose Ahab had been farther told, the ministers of the Son of God being thus left in the world to discharge, in his absence, their high office, thus and thus they will be received: many persons will avoid their sermons, for fear of being made uneasy by strong remonstrances against things on which they have set their hearts; and many more will shrink from allowing the instructions, which in public were spoken to all, to be applied by private reproof to themselves; some, being so reproved by their pastors, will be affronted all their lives long, will hate their persons, and despise their instruction; and hardly any will thank them, in earnest, for doing them the greatest service which one man can do to another, for opening their eyes to the worst of all evils, just as they were bringing it upon themselves. So that the very name which means a messenger of Christ, shall become among many a word of reproach; and they who seek to do good in that way, will be forced to use as much forethought, and invent as many various devices, not to fail of the good they wish, as the crafty schemers of this world use, in order to accomplish the worst of mischief.

If he, whom we blame for his usage of Micaiah, could have heard such a representation as this—and surely it is no more than a true representation of what happens daily among Christians—if Ahab, I say, could have had all this prophesied to him, would he not, with reason, have exclaimed against our times, as we, when we read his history, are apt to exclaim against him? And bad as his usage of Micaiah was, yet surely for Christian people to shun and dislike Christ's ministers, because they do not like to be told they are in a bad way—for the Galatians to account St. Paul their enemy because he tells them saving truth—this is as much worse than the conduct of Ahab, as the gospel, against which we

sin, is better and clearer than the law and the prophets by which only God had then revealed himself.

But this is not all, nor the worst. Other circumstances might be added, in such a prophetic view of the Christian world as I have now supposed, to leave us yet farther without excuse. It might be mentioned, how God's holy word, the Bible, made in due time perfect and entire by the addition of the New Testament of our Lord and Savior, would come in aid of his ministers everywhere, and in their place many times, where they could not be in person: there being no individual among us Christians, so poor or so unlearned, but he has it in his power, by the blessing of God, to hear or read out of that book enough to understand his duty and his danger. What then might not a man say, if he had been told beforehand, of the way in which the Bible should be brought within every one's reach; being told, at the same time, how it would be treated by the greater number? that however much it might be admired in words, it would be practically despised and slighted! That people would let it lie by them for years, hardly ever looking into it: that many would read it for mere amusement; some as a task which is well over; some out of pride of scholarship, or by way of showing themselves holier than others: hardly any for the true purpose, that of knowing their own faults, and trying to become fitter for heaven. I say, could Ahab, or any one else, have known all this beforehand, he might with some reason have thought that a generation which could be guilty of so abusing God's written word, had no great right to blame him for his dislike of the word spoken by the prophet.

And if he could have been farther told, to crown all, that the blessed Son of God himself, the author and giver of everlasting salvation, shall promise and offer, most affectionately, to continue his spiritual presence with his people, by giving himself to them, his body and blood, for the food of their souls in his holy sacrament; and that they would, almost universally, shun and forsake their divine presence, because in order to

approach it worthily, they must look their sins in the face, and this they would not have the heart to do; I say, could all this have been foreshown to Ahab, at any rate he would not have wanted company to keep him in countenance in his treatment of Micaiah. Is not his the very language, in which sinners too often speak to themselves of the holy communion. When you are called on to be better Christians, and are reminded, that there is yet one way, the sacrament of the Lord's supper, by which you obtain grace from the Lord: do you never, like Ahab, reject the advice, with some such unthankful expression as this: "I dread and dislike the Lord's supper, because the examination, which ought to go before it, would not prophesy good of me, but evil?" It would show you, that you are in a bad way; which is the last thing you want to be told. And yet if it really be so, you must be told it or lose yourself for ever.

Unquestionably, in all these things; in dislike of good advice from every quarter, especially from the messengers of Jesus Christ; in neglect of his word; in contempt of his sacraments; the comparison between the generality of Christians, and Ahab shrinking from the warnings of Micaiah, would make them out much worse than he was. For many of them are in a fair way to come at last to hate and shun, not only God's messengers, but God himself; because continuing, as they are, impenitent, he doth not prophesy good of them, but evil.

But, here, as in every other subject, our self-deceit will be busy with excuses; and among the very first which offer themselves, not a few are generally heard, drawn from the infirmities of the human teacher, through whom the divine warning proceeds. Some warnings, men say, are unkindly delivered, some rudely, some unseasonably; and one very common remark is, when people are told of the faults, that the adviser has mistaken the *kind* of fault. "There is enough about me that is wrong, I know, but in this particular respect, with which I am charged, I consider myself quite blame-



less." This is a mode of taking reproof, which almost every one must have observed. Now suppose it really so—that the warning in this instance *is* misplaced; what would a reasonable man do? Continue just where he was, without any reformation whatever? Nay, but he would turn his mind in good earnest to those parts of his own conduct, in which he cannot deny that he wants improvement: just as if a house was found out of repair, though not exactly where the owner had been told, he would not leave it just as it was, and go away affronted with the person who told him of it, but would put it in order where need was, and be much obliged by the timely warning which enabled him to do so. Then again, you should consider, that there is great danger of your mistaking yourself, and thinking you have no need to be warned on a point in which, perhaps, your wiser friends perceive you are most open to temptation. St. Peter thought he had no need to be warned against turning coward and denying his Master; but his Master himself knew better, and repeated the warning a good many times, that it might never be forgotten after the event: and though the apostle was grieved at the charge, and spoke vehemently in disavowal of it, we do not read that he was offended with his Lord; he did not, as Ahab did, and as many foolish sinners do, hate his adviser for prophesying evil concerning him. So far, we shall do well to follow his example; and if we add to it, that in which he unfortunately failed, a due mistrust and fear of ourselves, believing ourselves capable of any sin, if we are not continually on our guard, continually seeking aid from above; then we shall be thankful for any well-meant warning, how little soever, otherwise, we might seem to ourselves to need it. And perhaps those who are so much offended, when a friend or adviser mistakes their case, and offers what they account needless *censure*—such persons might do well to consider, what they would think of the same man's *praise*, if their conscience told them in any case that he was undeservedly bestowing *that* upon them. If they can find it in their hearts to be pleased with the

one, surely they have no right whatever to despise the other so very much.

Some do not deny their need of warning, only "they could not endure this or that warning; it was so rudely, so unseasonably delivered." But they should remember the end and purpose which the adviser had in his mind, in delivering what they call "a prophecy of evil" concerning them. Perhaps he saw them so dull and dead in their sins, that he thought it needful to be somewhat rude and vehement in his manner, the better to awaken them, and make them more attentive. As our Lord himself, the meekest and most charitable of all teachers, feared not to tell his disciples, that "if they would come after him, they must *hate* father and mother, brethren and sisters, wife and children, and their own soul also." "Hate them," that is, be ready to forsake them: which our Lord expressed by this startling word *hate*, in order that their attention may be thoroughly roused; that they might be set upon inquiring, What can he mean? And having inquired, might not soon forget it. It may be, that what seems to you rudeness, is mere friendly vehemence, intended, like this word of our divine Master, to put you more thoroughly on your guard. And, as to a warning being unseasonable or indiscreet, it is in every one's power at any time, as far as he is himself concerned, to prevent its doing harm in that way, by merely taking it as it was meant, and not being offended at it.

Finally, to take the worst case of all; advice, be it ever so unkindly delivered—the very taunts of reproachful enemies—may do a man the greatest good, if he will consider them in this true light, namely, as being permitted by God to humble him the more for his great sins. David, the man after God's own heart, though long before Christian times, made this truly Christian use of the curses uttered against him by Shimei, when he called him a bloody man. It brought his sin to his remembrance; for in the matter of Uriah, once in his life, he had acted like a bloody man; and he acknowledged, "the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David."

Abusive words, and even malicious calumnies, thus taken in the spirit of David, as hints to a man what he would deserve, if God should deal strictly with him according to his secret sins, might help him greatly in the work of repentance, instead of souring his temper, as they too often do, and causing anger, malice, and revenge. To say no more of Christian humility: common sense to be sure would teach one to remember, both in the last-mentioned case of advice unkindly given, and also in the former cases, which supposed it well-meaning, but mistaken in the manner, that any error of that kind in your admonisher may put him in the wrong, but cannot put you in the right. If Micaiah had been malicious toward Ahab, still the prophecy of God was true. We have our separate accounts to give; and no error, no vice even, in a minister of Christ, or in any one else, can excuse you for hating those warnings, which are delivered to you out of Christ's own mouth.

Least of all will any such excuse be allowed, as your not being able to endure an admonition, because it seems to prophesy evil concerning you, and would make you uneasy, and put you out of spirits. You know well enough that there is nothing in the Bible to make you uneasy or put you out of spirits, if you will in earnest part with your sins. Do this with purpose of heart, relying on your good God and Savior, and you will no more hate that voice which prophesies evil, not to you, but to your sins. You will then be really glad and thankful when any one tells you quietly of your faults; and not spiteful, nor at all unforgiving, though you be told of them somewhat roughly. Think for a moment, what peace and comfort, even in this present life, would ensue upon warnings being kindly and seriously taken; what sweetness and good temper such a rule would spread over our daily conversation with each other; how certain we should be to go on from day to day improving in our duties both to God and our neighbor.

The matter may be brought into a short compass. Will any Christian repent him at the hour of death, as having borne warnings too patiently? Or will he think, when the day of judgment comes, that it was best to turn away from serious advice, as not prophesying good of him, but evil?

## SERMON XXIV.

## THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT.

EPH. iv. 3.

“ Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

ONE part of St. Paul's meaning, in this part of the divine epistle to the Ephesians, is quite plain to every reader ; the earnestness, namely, with which he enforces mutual love, forbearance, and forgiveness. “ I, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation with which ye are called : with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.” So far, even the ordinary sort of persons, the world as it is called, would agree with the judgment of the apostle, however unwilling many may be to practise it. But in the next words, the words of the text, quite a new thought is introduced, a thought into which the world cannot enter. We are directed seriously to endeavor to keep, not simply the bond of peace—so far the world agrees with the gospel, and is forward to proclaim her agreement—but we are to keep the unity of the Spirit by means of this bond of peace. The great end of good-natured well-meaning men of the world, is simply to keep the peace among their neighbors, as being one of the greatest of earthly blessings. True evangelical Christian charity seeks peace also, and that most earnestly ; but she seeks it with a view to a greater blessing ; hoping by its means to preserve the unity of the Spirit ; that is, to keep people close to that body, of which Jesus Christ is the head, and to which they are united by his Spirit. The union and charity which the world admires is too often a false kind of truce ; persons agreeing, for a quiet life, to let

one another go on without warning or contradiction, in the worst religious errors, and in neglect of the most sacred and divine duties. But the union and charity for which the church instructs us every day to pray, is something which goes far deeper: binding men together, not for the present only, by their agreeing to say nothing about their differences, but for all time, nay for eternity, by actually rendering them of one mind in regard of the highest and holiest truths. For this real and solid union, the church instructs us to pray daily. I mean in the collect for all conditions of men, wherein every evening of his life the considerate worshipper beseeches Almighty God, that "all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life." Not only in the bond of peace and in righteousness of life, but also in unity of spirit, and this, in maintenance of the true faith. There are some who think this impossible; considering the various opinions and tempers of mankind on all subjects, they say it is out of the question, ever prevailing on them to serve God in Christ with one consent. But the church evidently does not think it impossible, otherwise she would not have taught us to beg it as a blessing of God every day of our lives. Neither did St. Paul think it impossible: else he would not have besought the Corinthians, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that there might be no division among them; but, that they should all not only speak the same thing, but also be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." An admonition as strange and unreasonable—on the notions of those who think religious differences impossible to be avoided, and therefore not so very blameable—as if the apostle had directed us all to think the same colors beautiful, the same tastes pleasant, the same sounds harmonious. There must of course be some great mistake in the way of judging so inconsistent with the language and meaning of the Holy Spirit. Nor is the mistake hard to be pointed out. It is just this: that people judge of things by the rules

and measures of the world instead of the gospel. They do not believe, or do not remember, that the Holy Spirit of God is at hand to help men in being of one mind; that he really did keep the church united in all material things, and with only partial and occasional exceptions, for the first six hundred years and more.

For indeed the gospel and church of our Lord Jesus Christ has this among its special privileges, that it makes all things so entirely one; just as one especial curse of the Anti-Christian power, the world, the enemy of the gospel, is continual division and separation of what else was united. Jerusalem, says the Holy Psalmist, is built as a city that is at unity in itself. But the very name of the world, or city of God's enemies, is Babel, or confusion: its curse, from the beginning, was to be divided and scattered into all the nations of the earth; to be broken into a thousand people, speaking as many different languages, and no two of them understanding each other. The men of this world have each their own object, and that changing from time to time according to their humors, fancy, or momentary profit. The young irreligious man has one object, the old another, the middle-aged another: and truly even in this world they often feel it a fearful judgment to be torn, and distracted, and pulled, as it were different ways by their wavering, inconsistent passions, and fancies. So, that, in this as in other more frightful senses, that is found true which the prophet repeatedly declares, "There is no peace, nor rest, saith my God, to the wicked." On the other hand, it is the blessing of the worthy members of God's kingdom, to be at unity, first each man with himself, and then all men one among another. The whole mind and temper is formed, the whole inclination of the man is swayed, by one great overpowering principle, swallowing up all the rest: that is, the desire of pleasing God in Christ Jesus. This makes the good Christian, however weak and ignorant in other respects, a noble, steady, consistent character; he knows always which way he is to look, what rule he must abide by, and what example he must

follow. All things to him are drawn as it were into one point: and as long as he keeps that steadily and devoutly in view, he knows that he cannot miss it; he must be continually making progress, whether he feels it himself or no.

Hitherto I have been speaking of the blessings of that unity, which Christian holiness secures to each person inwardly within his own heart and mind. But St. Paul in the text had chiefly an eye to the unity of the church, or of Christians one among another. For, after enjoining us each one in particular to try and keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, thus he goes on; \* "There is one body," &c. All these are so many circumstances in the situation of a Christian man, so many reasons why he should practise the Christian duty just before enjoined, of endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit. Let us briefly consider the meaning and force of each of them.

"There is one body," that is, the body of Jesus Christ. The church apostolical throughout the whole world is really though mystically united to our Lord and Savior, and in virtue of that most divine and mysterious union, is entitled to be fed with his flesh and blood in the holy sacrament of the eucharist. As surely then as there is but one Christ, and as all the children of Adam have the same need of being mystically united to him, if ever they would escape the curse of Adam, so surely is there but one body, into which we are all engrafted. And to say that God is equally well pleased with all the various bodies calling themselves Christians, provided all are equally sincere, equally moral and charitable in their conduct, is the same absurdity as if you should say, there are more Christs than one, to whom we may be spiritually united, and God has given power to every man to choose his own.

Again, "there is but one Spirit," the Spirit of Christ poured largely on his mystical body the church, even as it dwelt without measure in his visible mortal body,

\* See verses 4-6.



when here among us. By the heavenly assistance and power of that good Spirit in holy baptism, we are translated out of that solitude in which we were born, a miserable, forlorn, helpless condition; we are taken from ourselves, that is, from the power of darkness, and are anointed and pressed as it were into one mass, with him who is the channel of true and healthful grace. Dare any one be so profane as to reckon that the holy ever blessed Comforter, animates and quickens alike those who are joined to the true body of Christ, and those who are as yet separated from him? It cannot be; it is an affront to Christ to say so, making out his precious blood to have been shed in vain. I beseech you, therefore, let us never allow ourselves, out of a false and unkind charity, to think lightly of the difference between those who truly have Christ's sacraments, are thoroughly joined to his mystical body, and those who have them not, or having, care not to use them. We might by the same rule go on to think lightly of the differences between Heathens and Christians; between those who have, and those who want the blessed hope of everlasting life. For so the apostle tells us by his manner of proceeding. "There is one body, and one Spirit, *even as ye are called,*" &c. As much as to say, you find no difficulty in acknowledging that we have all but one hope. All Christians, all the world over, look to one and the same heaven, prepared for all alike by the mercy of the same Savior. Now, then, take it for a certain truth, that on earth there is but one church, one only body, quickened by one only Spirit, which is ordained to nurse and prepare men for that everlasting abode. This you must believe, as surely as you believe the other; although, in some respects, you may find it a harder point. For the happy state of the redeemed hereafter is a thing so entirely out of sight, that if we have faith to believe it at all, there is no additional difficulty in believing, that to all, in kind, it is one and the same. All will shine with the same sort of heavenly light, however one star may differ from another star in glory. But when we are called on to believe the holy

catholic church here on earth, we find it hard to believe, that persons whom we see with our eyes to be, in many respects, so distant, so utterly unconnected with each other, and quite unaware, most commonly, of each other's existence; sometimes, perhaps, still more painfully separated by jealousies and suspicions which will hereafter vanish away—we find it hard to believe that Christians now living are not merely in a figure of speech, but by a real mysterious work of God's Holy Spirit, joined with God's departed people of all times, in one holy universal body, as truly as the limbs of our own bodies are joined in one. This, I say, is especially hard to believe, because so many of the persons, concerning whom we are to believe it, are continually in our sight; and there is little or nothing, as we look at them, which naturally leads us to consider them as so joined in one blessed company. Nevertheless, says St. Paul, you must believe this of all Christians, on the same ground as you believe that the same heaven is provided for all. There must be unity and grace here, to prepare men for unity in glory hereafter.

And to bring this still more home to our minds, the apostle goes on and reckons up many other things which all Christians know to be the very same to all. There is "one Lord" Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him: "one faith," that of the Holy Trinity, as set forth in the creeds of the church, into which faith we were all baptized: "one baptism," once for all, administered to every Christian soul and body, with water and the regenerating Spirit, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Last, "there is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all:" the mysterious, unspeakable centre or point, in whom, if we may so say, meet all the various rays or streams of glory, connecting this visible earth with the highest heaven—who is, indeed, all in all. God is perfect unity: and let us not doubt that his church, the most perfect of his works in this fallen earth, is also perfectly one, whatever appearances there may now be to the contrary.

But the more this heavenly and spiritual union of all Christians in one body is out of sight, and above understanding, the more necessary it is that we should be continually put in mind of it. Having once learned it (as we all have in the apostles' creed) we should never allow ourselves to forget it; else we shall be often doing many things, in carelessness or in ignorance, most contrary to this divine unity. Therefore the apostle lays such stress on the word "endeavoring" in the text;—"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:" that is, making a serious object of it: looking to church union and communion distinctly, as one great purpose of our lives. Do Christians in general, do we ourselves, attend as we ought to this precept of the Holy Ghost? Do not a good many, even of the well-disposed, rather behave as if church union would come of itself, without any care of theirs, provided they be in their several ways honest, sober, and devout? The bond of peace they understand, and perceive the benefits of it: but the unity of the Spirit is a matter of faith, not of sight; they either never think of it at all, or dismiss it at once out of their minds, saying, it is above them, and all they can do, is to live quietly among their neighbors of all sorts. Somewhat of this sort, I think, must be in people's minds, when they so quietly allow themselves, week after week, and festival after festival, to be content without waiting on God in his own holy house. Let us not deceive ourselves: it seems a simple thing, to attend on the prayers regularly offered there, and kneel before God, and sing his praise, and call upon him in the appointed words and in the appointed place: yet nothing is more certain, than that every voluntary absence from these solemn assemblies is so far a breach of Christian unity, a neglect and forfeiture of the communion of saints. Consider it as a privilege, rather than as a duty, and you will perceive, that, in what I have now said, I am not going beyond the truth. Do not say, it is no where set down in Scripture, that we must go to church so very regularly;—what great difference can it make, my going rather seldomer than I might, missing this

or that opportunity ? but say this rather—I know that whenever I go there, whether on Sundays or on weekdays, I am where Christ has promised to be, among two or three gathered together in his name—I know that it must be a blessed privilege to be near him, whether I feel edified and comforted at the time, or no : I will, therefore, by God's grace, walk according to this faith, and not suffer any frivolous, unnecessary engagement, nor yet any cold, heartless calculation of just how much is my absolute duty, to keep me from Christ's solemn assemblies, which, rightly used, are so many steps toward heaven. Is there anything in this way of thinking, unworthy of a sound faith or of a reasonable piety ? Is it not rather in exact agreement with those scriptures, which teach us that the whole of the spiritual life is a matter of faith, not of sight, or feeling ; and that the blessed gospel is a law of liberty, according to which, whatever is done, is best done when joyfully and willingly offered, not exacted as a wearisome duty ?

By what has been now said, one question is sufficiently answered, which many persons may naturally be ready to ask, when such obligations are pressed on them, as this of keeping the unity of the Spirit. It may come into their minds, what can I do ; I who am no clergyman, but a mere private Christian, toward so great an object as this, of keeping the church at unity in itself ? In answer to this, I would remind you of those many scriptures in which the church of Christ is represented as a holy building or temple, whereof the materials are, not earthly stones, but the sanctified and regenerated souls and bodies of Christians ; living stones, as St. Peter entitles us all, forming one spiritual household. Now this description belongs to every one of us ; to the humblest little Christian child as truly as to the chiefest apostle : each is, as it were, but a single stone in the building, although the apostles and their successors be indeed foundation stones, whereas the others only hold their place in the building, as God has set them here and there. So far then the layman or the child has the same duty with the apostle, that is, to maintain his post

in the building ; and not to loosen it, as the withdrawing of any stone must do. He must, therefore, adopt the same ways with the apostle, of keeping himself in the church, and so far keeping the church one. Now, how the apostles kept themselves in the church, we know by their own accounts in the acts and epistles : they continued daily in breaking of bread and in prayer ; they kept under their bodies by fasting, and brought them into subjection ; they were very diligent in recommending, in all ways, that Christians should keep up their solemn assemblies ; they never, for a moment, thought of themselves as of single unconnected persons, but always as of members of Christ's body, stones in the holy temple, the church.

So, then, ought we to act and think, if we would do our part in the great work and kingdom of our God and of his Christ. Humble though it be in comparison, it is yet our part ; and it is to be done as the apostles did theirs—by great exactness in outward communion, so far as our circumstances allow, and by constantly remembering the church in our prayers at home, and in the education of her children, and in the discharge of our household duties.

And let it not be thought, that in thus recommending great exactness in outward communion, we are setting up the form above the substance, the body of religion above the spirit. Our outward communion, if we come with devout minds, is indeed real spiritual worship ; it is the very way by which God has promised to bestow on us the treasures of spiritual grace. Consider the several church services in their order, how between them they make provision for all that an immortal but fallen spirit can need to bring it at once into communion with God, and keep it so for ever. First, regenerating grace comes by holy baptism, whereby as infants, being once for all made partakers of the atoning blood of our Redeemer, and sanctified by his holy Spirit, we need afterward from time to time only supplies and renewals of the same grace ; which supplies and renewals are afforded by laying on of hands in confirmation, by contin-

ual prayer at home, and in solemn assemblies; by fasting in due season, and, most of all, by the holy eucharist. Now every one of these duties has something in it outward as well as inward and spiritual; the body has a part to perform in them as well as the soul. For even in the most retired private prayer, the very act of "sitting alone and keeping silence," is such as cannot be performed without the body; and therefore it is in vain for persons to draw a distinction between outward and spiritual services, as if the latter could be at all perfect without the other. More especially it is the height of presumption for any one to think of continuing a lively member of Christ's body, without receiving that which is the very principle of union in that body—the flesh and blood of our Lord in the holy eucharist. St. Paul has taught us to consider this as the very cement of the Christian building, the essence as it were which runs throughout the whole mass, and gives life and spirit to all. For he has said, "We being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." As much as to say, that if we have not our share in that bread, if we refuse our part in that communion, we have no reason to think that we are one body: we are left single as it were and unsupported, to bear the burthen of our many sins and miseries. The wise and excellent Bishop Wilson had so strong a feeling of the necessity of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper to our being lively members of Christ's body, as to have left it on record that he should have been even afraid to pray, if he were not in the habit of receiving the holy communion.

Such as were the thoughts and practice of that good bishop, such was the judgment and practice of the universal church in the first and best ages. All baptized Christians, at least all of full age, were then communicants, except such as were under the censures of the church, and were doing penance to prepare themselves for communion by and by. All were communicants; and one blessed consequence was, that the unity of the Spirit was kept in such great perfection as it is hard for

us even to imagine in our days. The holy church throughout all the world was one living and feeling body; feeling, I say, throughout its extent whatever happened to any part or extremity of it. The Christians in Asia sympathized with the Christians of Rome, both in their joys and in their sorrows: they made known to one another the trials and dangers which they underwent in defence of the common truth; they prayed and gave thanks for one another; they warned one another against heresies and errors: they fought the battles of our Lord and his cross, though at a great earthly distance, yet with one heart and one mind.

Let us endeavor, each in his station, to serve God in his church as regularly, as punctually, as humbly, as they did: and when we cannot serve him in his church, yet to remember the church at home; and no doubt, unworthy as we are, our blessing will be like theirs. We may never see what they saw, on earth, the church universal of one accord, of one mind; but we may hope to see in heaven, through the merits of him who hath purchased for us every blessing; through him, I say we may hope to see in heaven, that of which even the first and best church was but a faint shadow and emblem—the unity of the spirit, kept perfectly in the bond of everlasting peace.

## SERMON XXV.

## GOD AN IMPARTIAL JUDGE.

1 PETER i. 17.

“If ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.”

THERE is a verse in the psalms very full of instruction, which might perhaps be not unfity taken as a text for this whole epistle of St. Peter. It is at the end of the 111th psalm, in which David had been giving most high praise and glory to God for his marvellous and distinguishing mercy toward his own chosen and peculiar people. “He hath given meat unto them that fear him; he shall ever be mindful of his covenant. He hath showed his people the power of his works that he may give them the heritage of the heathen. He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever.” This is the holy psalmist’s account of the high privileges and honors given to those, whom the great God of heaven and earth chooses to be his own people and servants—to the Jews first, and afterward to us Christians. But observe how he follows it up; and this is the very instructive verse which I just mentioned. “*The fear of the Lord* is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do thereafter: the praise of it endureth for ever.” As much as to say, that, great and glorious as the mercies are, which God has provided for his own elect people, they are not such as ought for a moment to set us free from that godly fear, that religious and awful sense of God’s unspeakable presence, which is the beginning, the head and crown, of all spiritual wisdom. “The praise of it en-



dureth for ever ;” it is not to be set aside after a time, as if it were but a mere beginning. The fear of God is not a thing to be used for bringing babes to Christ, and then to be discarded and done without as fast as persons grow up to spiritual manhood : rather it must accompany those, who would walk worthy of God’s high calling, from the beginning to the end of their time here on earth. It must be joined indeed with love, but we must never expect, we must never endeavor, to turn it entirely into such love as we feel toward those who are dear to us here among men. In a word, the love and fear of God will grow up together in a religious and thoughtful heart ; as we come to know more of him as the greatest and best of fathers.

Such is the psalmist’s account of the fear of God : and lest any person, having an eye to the infinite blessings of the gospel of Christ, made known to us but unknown to him, should imagine that this description of God’s fear is now as it were out of date ; that since the Son of God is come, and is not ashamed to call us brethren, we may go on with less awe and reverence, more at our ease in the dreadful presence of the Almighty ; lest we should dream of being assured of his personal favor and consequently grow careless of exactly obeying him, familiar and irreverent in his service ; I wish all Christians would observe how earnestly the very same lesson is taught in the New Testament also. Our Lord, as well as David and Moses, nay more awfully than David and Moses, forewarns us whom we shall fear ; him namely, who is able to cast both body and soul into hell : this caution our Savior gives more awfully than the prophets of old, but how much he is the very judge who shall pass the dreadful sentence which he threatens : and also because the time was come for speaking more plainly of eternal life and death, than ever they had power and authority to do.

And observe, he speaks thus, not to those who were still at a distance from him, but to his own chosen apostles and followers, to those whom in the same discourse he calls his friends and his little flock. “Fear

not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Fear not them, which kill the body, and afterward have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear. Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." Surely this one text is enough to do away with all presumptuous irreverent notions of any persons ever becoming so good, or so high in God's favor, as to do without the fear of God.

It is true, St. John says, "Perfect love casteth out fear," but what fear? surely not religious reverence of the ever present Almighty Father, but rather the fear of what man can do to separate us from his love: or the mistrust and doubt too natural to us all, as to whether God will indeed fulfil the blessed promises of the Bible: this sort of fear, perfect love does indeed cast out, but not that fear with which angels and good men must each worship before the infinite Creator: not that filial, reverential fear which is "the beginning of wisdom, and the praise of it endureth for ever."

As I said before, this verse of the Psalmist might well stand for a kind of text to the whole first Epistle of St. Peter. For that epistle, although no portion whatever of the New Testament, dwells more upon Christian privileges, yet is every where deeply marked with the reverent fear of Almighty God. The apostle writes to the whole body of eastern Christians, as "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father:" he speaks to them as to persons "rejoicing with unspeakable joy:" he assures them that the salvation which they had actually attained was so blessed, as to be the great object of inquiry and expectation on the part of God's holy prophets since the world began. And what is the conclusion he draws from these unspeakable blessings and privileges? Is it, "because God has favored you, therefore you may take your salvation for granted; it will be all done for you?" Quite the contrary: the instruction which St. Peter would build on these our Christian honors and privileges, is such as follow:—"As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of

conversation. Because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy." And again, "Seeing ye have purified your hearts through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another out of a pure heart, fervently." And, "you who in time past were not a people, but now are the people of God; you who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy; I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." And to mention but one more instance, he bids them remember that they are "free," partakers of spiritual liberty through Jesus Christ, not in order that they "might use such their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness," an excuse for sin, but "as servants of God."

On the whole, it is plain that St. Peter was in some measure afraid, lest the Christians to whom he was writing should so dwell on favors received, be so entirely taken up with the comfortable promises of the gospel, as to forget the fear of God, and the plain duty of keeping the commandments. He is therefore earnest everywhere, in endeavoring to temper their affectionate gratitude to Christ with deep and awful reverence, such as is due from sinners to their judge, from creatures to their Creator. The passage in the text is a remarkable instance of this. "Seeing ye call him Father," who is above all the partialities and weak indulgence of earthly parents; who is just, severe, and true, even to his most highly favored children; "who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work;" take care that ye "pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

As if he had said, It is our privilege to call God, our Father which art in heaven. Christ himself in his own prayer has authorized the faithful to do it. And it was their privilege; none but believers might enjoy it; for which reason one title given in old times to the Lord's prayer, was "the prayer of the faithful," or of the believers. Such therefore were allowed by God's own express word to call on him as their Father; to call themselves by his name, his children, in such a sense as

no other man might. God is indeed the Father of all, but it is only to Christians, that he has expressly given permission to call him Father, and to account themselves his household and children.

Here the irreligious pride of some men might presently come in, and tempt them to imagine that God is partial to them; that he favors them above others, and therefore they may take liberties; he will not be so strict in requiring an account how they have kept his laws. But St. Peter teaches us just the contrary: even as the last of the prophets, Malachi, had taught before, looking forward by the Spirit to a time, when men having greater privileges than ever, would be in danger of abusing them more than ever. "If I be a Father where is mine honor?" How can you call the great God of heaven and earth by a name which brings him so very near you, and not feel an awful kind of thrill, a sense of his presence in your very heart? We all know how it is with a child who is conscious to himself that his parent is watching him at the moment, and knows that he is a parent who will not put up with wrong things, how affectionate soever he may be; such a child will be more restrained from giving way to any wrong passion or habit, by the presence of such a father, than by the presence of a stranger; and so, argues the apostle, will it be with you, if you have anything like the feeling of sons: God's tender fatherly care over you will be a reason, not for presumption, but for fear.

More especially, when you add that which he takes notice of in the next place: that this our heavenly Father, by whose name we are called, is one who "without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work." "Without respect of persons," that is, without such blind fond partialities, as are continually mingling themselves with the likings and dislikes of men, and perverting their judgments, when they mean to be most impartial.

This was in a great degree a discovery of God's nature and character made by the gospel. Before the coming of our Lord and Savior, neither Jew nor Gentile

looked on the God of heaven as being impartial, and judging without respect of persons. As for the Gentiles, they supposed there were as many gods as there were cities or nations among them: that every place had its protecting deity; such as Chemosh the god of the Moabites, Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, Beelzebub the god of Ekron, Diana of the Ephesians, and so on; and to these and the other evil spirits which they worshipped, they attributed all the bad and childish passions which frail men indulge in, and to the same excess: as the Psalmist says, "They thought wickedly, that God was even such a one as themselves."

Again, even God's own people, the Jews were generally apt more or less to mistake the nature and meaning of the great favor, which God Almighty had shown them for so many ages. They kept continually saying within themselves, "We have Abraham to our father;" in such a manner as if they were sure of especial consideration to be had of them on that account merely; as if they might be looser in their conduct than other men. For which reason the Almighty kept continually warning them in such words as those of the prophet Amos: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I visit you for all your iniquities."

When therefore both Jew and Gentile were to be called into one great family in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the things most necessary to be taught was, "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." This St. Peter had taught long ago to the Jews, when, by especial direction of the Holy Ghost, he had to convert and baptize Cornelius and his household, the first-fruits of the Gentile world to Jesus Christ: and now again he repeats the same instruction to the converted Gentiles themselves, lest they should abuse their own privileges, and fancy they were entitled to favor at the hands of the most holy God, merely for being on his side; as their forefathers had imagined themselves secure of the favor of this or that

false god, because they were among his worshippers, and belonged to the place where his temple was. Therefore St. Peter bids them take notice, that our God is an impartial God, he judges "without respect of persons."

Nor may we imagine that the apostle spoke to the men of those times only; we too, and the Christians of all times, are in danger of the same kind of error: we are all too apt to indulge the childish imagination, that our own case has something particular in it, and unlike all the rest of the world: that God Almighty therefore, just and terrible as he is, will surely make exceptions in our favor; we know not how, but somehow or another we flatter ourselves, that we individually shall escape the sentence, pronounced in Holy Scripture against those, who fall into deadly sin, after being delivered from sin by holy baptism. Is it not so, that we all of us, young and old, many times before now, have humored and flattered ourselves with blind notions of this kind? We have not, of course, said to ourselves, in so many letters and syllables, "God will judge us differently from others; we have not the same occasion as they to take these threatenings literally to ourselves." This has not been our way of reasoning, distinctly; but in a blind indistinct way we have used ourselves to something very like this. We have dreamed that God knew something about us, which made our case unlike that of the rest of the world; and we have in our conduct taken liberties accordingly.

I will instance a fault against which Holy Scripture, the Scriptures of the New Testament, are as plain and as terrible as against any whatsoever; and yet this is perhaps of all faults the one for which persons generally excuse themselves most easily on the plea of there being something extraordinary in their case: I mean the crime of lying; of which St. John says openly, "All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." This notwithstanding, how easily do most men allow themselves in various ways of lying, for gain, for credit,

for convenience sake, and make no sort of scruple about it, nor believe themselves at all the worse Christians. It is plain that such as do so, and yet read and believe their Bibles, must have some way, hardly known perhaps to themselves, of getting rid of this fearful denunciation, and persuading themselves that they are not of the number of those, to whom the bottomless pit is thus threatened. But in vain: since they are clearly warned that "God is no respecter of persons;" and he who has warned them, will soon come fearfully to convince them.

And to give them the less excuse for their error, the same Scriptures which are thus express in declaring the perfect impartiality of the heavenly Judge, that is, his purpose to decide in every case, according to his rule; those same Scriptures, I say, tell us, no less clearly, what the rule will be. "The dead, small and great, will stand before God, and will be judged out of what is written in the book, *according to their works.*" "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every man may receive the things done in the body, *according to that he hath done*, whether it be bad or good." "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man *according as his work shall be.*"

These are a few of the many plain declarations of God's Holy Spirit, as to the rule of judgment, by which the Son of God our Savior, will determine our sentence at the last day: and they come, you see, to the same with St. Peter's, in the text. "God, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work."

The reward, then, of those who shall receive God's blessing at last, will be strictly in proportion, not to their deservings, for those strictly speaking are none at all; they owing to God a perfect obedience, and it being but of his undeserved mercy, that he accepts any such homage as a penitent sinner can offer him; the reward, therefore, and blessing of the last day, will be in proportion, not to their deservings, but to their sincerity and steadiness in working. "They will be justified," as St. Paul says, "by faith, without works of any law," that

is, by the free and undeserved mercy of God in Christ Jesus, accepting their faith as if it were perfect obedience: yet, in another sense, they are justified by the works of the gospel law, not by faith only; that is, God graciously accepts, not their bare nominal good meaning, but their good meaning proved by their works, as the proper condition on which he vouchsafes to pardon them, and make and keep them members of his Son our Lord.

And there is no respect of persons on this plan: because the faith meant is not a strong emotion, or lifting up of the soul, more or less sudden and sensible; but it is the deliberate, calm, steady devotion of the heart, to do the will of God our Savior, and not our own will. This faith, like all other good habits, is (under God's Holy Spirit) the result of continual good works; the more good we do, the more we cherish and refresh it; and God, by it, makes us worthy, and reckons us worthy, of his kingdom. There is not, in all this, one word of partial arbitrary preference, as though the Judge, to please himself, took out of the number of mankind here one, and there another, to be endowed with faith, and finally saved, whether themselves will or no. Against all such human inventions the truth of God stands clear in the text, and in a great many other places: "God, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work."

Therefore, let us fear, for we have indeed great reason: let us fear, lest, so much depending, as plainly does depend, on our own works, those works be found at the last day to be nothing at all, or next to nothing. And having this fear in us, let us by God's grace endeavor for the future, to work more soberly and diligently; not as if any thing we can do would suffice, or at all avail, to "put away our sins, or endure the severity of God's judgment;" but, as being quite entirely sure, that without such good works, not even the precious blood of Christ will avail for us at the last day. They would not have purchased heaven, and yet the want of them may, and will, most undoubtedly shut out from



heaven. Who, I say again, can think of this, and not fear and tremble, comparing his own progress in holiness with the opportunities which God has given him?

This consideration of itself is surely terrible enough; but there is one thing yet remaining, which makes it yet more alarming to the conscience: and it is that which St. Peter sets before us by his use of the word "*sojourning*" in this passage. "Pass the time of your *sojourning* here in fear." As much as to say, "Pass your time in fear, not knowing how short it may be." Since you are to be judged by your works, some good space of time, generally speaking, must be necessary, for you to obtain those right habits, those devout, pure, and just dispositions of mind, without which heaven itself, had you made your way thither, would be no heaven to you. Some good space of time, some regular course and practice of holy desires, good counsels, and just works, must be generally necessary, before you can be duly clad with the wedding-garment, the robe of holiness, which God in his mercy threw over you in holy baptism, but which you, too often, by your unworthy behavior, have more or less thrown off. Some good while is necessary: and, for aught you know, you have but a moment.

The churchyards around us are fast filling; the gates of the unseen world are opening, every day almost, to receive one or another of our neighbors and acquaintance: it may be our own turn next; very soon it must be so: and what have we done to be ready for it? how far have we advanced, by the heavenly aid of God's spirit, in that great and difficult work, of putting off the mind of this world, and putting on the mind of Christ?

These questions if we continually ask ourselves, we shall, according to the holy apostle's advice (*his* advice, who, at one time suffered himself so grievously by presumption), we shall "pass the time of our *sojourning* here in fear:" not slavish fear of God, as of a hard master, but reverent and religious fear and love of him as of a watchful ever-present Judge, yet most merciful Father and helper. Such a fear, as shall quicken us

from time to time, in bringing forth the fruit of good works, and laying up our treasure in heaven. Happy, indeed, most happy and blessed, according to the saying of the wise man, is he that so "feareth always."

## SERMON XXVI.

GOD WILL BE SERVED IN FEAR.

1 PETER i. 17.

"Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

If these words were not known for certain to be the words of Holy Scripture ; If they were merely words of advice, gathered by some good men out of much meditation on the instruction provided for us by the Holy Ghost in the book of God, I make no doubt they would appear to many very severe, very ill-timed, very unfit to win souls to God, very unlike the mild and indulgent spirit, which, as they persuade themselves, is the chief mark of God's holy gospel. "What," it would be said, "are people to fear *always*? *all* people, those who are farthest advanced in true religion and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost? Is life to be passed *altogether* in jealous discomfort, in severe denying ourselves? What, then, is to become of the natural cheerfulness of youth ; of the enjoyments inseparable from even health and spirits, quiet and comfortable times, affectionate and kind relations and friends ; what of the testimony of a good conscience ; what of that full assurance of hope, which the sacred Scriptures of the New Testament mention as one fruit of God's good Spirit in the heart?"

All this and more would be said, by persons unwilling to walk in the true fear of God, against such a maxim as that of St. Peter in the text, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear," if that maxim were not known to be the very words of Holy Scripture. All this and more *is* said by different sorts of persons, against those, who, following God's own method, would make them

serious in the true Scriptural way; by teaching them, and encouraging them in, the true reverence, dread, and awe of God's holy and glorious presence, and of the eternal world, toward which they are close approaching.

It may be through God's blessing, of use to us, if we now consider what those tempers and habits are, which are most apt to make men impatient of being told to "pass the time of their sojourning here in fear." We may hope to find some instruction, as to the best way of training ourselves to a better mind, and avoiding that heathenish kind of devotion, which makes them dissatisfied with the teaching both of God and man, except it tend to make them gay and cheerful for the moment.

I call it a heathenish kind of devotion, for such indeed it is: it is like the earthly and carnal notions of those who even now in idolatrous countries gather themselves around the temples of their false gods, and cry out, one to another, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." "Come ye," say they, "and we will fetch wine, and fill ourselves with strong drink, and to-morrow shall be as this day, and yet more abundant." These words of the prophet, which describe the behavior of certain persons in his time, enemies to all religion, are but of too near resemblance to the thoughts and ways of a good many in our time, who yet most carefully profess and call themselves Christians.

Indeed, there is a certain time of life, in which we are almost all of us, if the truth must be owned, more or less partakers of this pagan error, of disliking all that is really serious, all that would impress us deeply and thoroughly with the fear and dread of Almighty God. When youth, and strength, and spirits, are high, before we have tasted of our Father's severer discipline, we shrink, almost all of us, from the graver and sadder lessons of Scripture and the church: we say to ourselves, and allow others to say to us, "Surely this world, so full of enjoyment, can never have been meant merely as a place for the exercise of hard and severe penitence;" and thus by degrees we allow ourselves to be led on, until too many of us forget almost entirely

the better mind of our innocent and simple childhood: that mind, which before had caused us to take God and our parents and teachers, who are in God's stead to us, at their word: which had made us really thoughtful in our prayers, and diligent from time to time, in our self-examinations. Too often it happens, that, as years go on, and we come more and more within reach of the corrupting world, the happy tempers learned in serious and religious childhood are spoiled and marred, one after another; one after another, we learn and are emboldened to take liberties with holy things, to think lightly of what before would have shocked us; prayer without regularity and seriousness, conversation without restraint, wilful pleasing of ourselves in all matters in which we have any choice; these things seem by degrees less shocking and more natural to us; we grow more and more inclined to say of this and that, "I don't care;" and you all know, even by the proverb, to what sort of an end "not caring" is sure to lead.

If, then, any young person happen now to be listening to me, let me beseech him to be aware of this danger; to watch in himself that spirit of confidence and gayety, which, under pretence of mere youthful cheerfulness, would lead him to make light of God's most holy commandments, and of the means of grace, appointed in his church, for the preservation of our first blessed baptismal innocency.

Let me in particular beseech and warn you, not to listen to those who, whether in jest or in earnest, would persuade you, that you are too young to come to the holy communion. Our church fixes no limit of age, but distinctly declares, that no person is too young, who is "willing and desirous to be confirmed;" that is, who can give some account of the Christian hope that is in him, and can make a steady resolution, by God's blessing, so to live as not to forfeit that hope. Wherever I go, I hear young persons saying, they know it is their duty to attend the holy table, but they consider themselves full young as yet; they see others going, who, as they think, are never the better; and so, for their

part, they mean to wait, and see whether, some years hence, they shall not be fitter than they are now. I would say to all who use such language as this, "Look to it, for evil is before you. Under pretence of reverence to your Savior, you are but encouraging the lightness and childishness of your own inconsiderate unsteady heart. You cannot bear the thought of passing the whole time of your sojourning and abode on earth in such devout fear as St. Peter recommends to all: you think it would be a dull melancholy thing to begin seriousness so early in life; and so you put the whole matter off, like Felix, to a more convenient season, which season, to most of you will never come.

"As to other young persons, bolder as you think than yourself, communicating, and being never the better for it; that is really no reason at all, why you should abstain from communion, though it is a very strong reason, why you should most diligently prepare yourself for it. Do so, and you need not fear to come: young as you are, and of yourself unworthy, Christ has invited you as expressly as your elders and betters: it is not Christian fear, but extreme heathenish rashness, when he has ordained this one way for you to have life through him, and you draw back as though you could do without him."

"But the sacrament is such a very solemn thing."— True; and is it not a solemn thing to die? Is it not an extremely solemn thing to spend one's time, day and night, in the immediate presence of the great and holy God? This you must do; withdraw yourself as you may from his sacraments, you cannot withdraw yourself from his sight, nor from his Almighty hand. He will ask you, by-and-by, why you did not strengthen your youth against temptation, by the early and frequent use of that sovereign medicine, *The body and blood of his dear Son*. This God will ask you; consider in good time, whether it will be enough for you to answer, that you were some way from the church; that you were afraid of falling into sin afterward; that you have known many go, who did not seem to improve.

Doubtless, if the lambs and little ones of Jesus Christ

would seriously turn in their minds, what they know very well, concerning the bread of life and the cup of salvation, the face of things in this respect would be quite altered. Those who now shrink from the blessed eucharist, would draw near to it humbly, as to the most glorious of all privileges; those who come seldom would come oftener; those who come without sufficient thought and consideration, would recollect themselves more thoroughly, and practise a religious fear. And what would be the consequence, even as to that cheerfulness, which because young people are afraid of losing, they too often give up every kind of serious thought? Why, they would begin from that day forward to be infinitely more hopeful and settled, though perhaps less gay and confident, than before they listened to their Lord's gracious call.

It is one of the greatest mistakes to imagine, that the sort of fear which men practise in worthy communicating, is an enemy to real refreshment, and cheerfulness, real joy and peace of heart. Nothing but want of faith, of considerate faith, could ever have put such a thought in a Christian's mind. Once really believe, and recollect, that he who gives himself to you in that sacrament, is the life and joy of the whole world: that by virtue of it, you have constant mysterious communion with our Lord Jesus Christ, the rest of the weary and heavy-laden, not only at the moment of receiving, but afterward also; even as the virtue of bodily food is perceived in the nourishment which it gives after the meal, and not at the table only: believe and remember this, and you cannot but acknowledge that the holy sacrament is the last thing to make persons sad, gloomy, and cheerless;—unless you believe it would have been a sad, gloomy, cheerless thing, to be an attendant in person on our divine Master, as he went about doing good: unless heaven itself be in your account a sad, gloomy, cheerless place.

It is true, the sort of rest and satisfaction, which our Lord by his Spirit pours into the hearts of those who come worthily to his altar, is not of a gay tumultuous

sort: it does not make people *light-minded*, though in a certain sense it makes them very *light-hearted*; it does not flash to and fro, any more than do the joys of heaven, any more than did the joy of those favored disciples, who knew our blessed Lord face to face, who lay in his bosom, and whom he called friends. Theirs, no doubt, was a calm, quiet, deep-seated consolation and security, which the world knew nothing of; but was it for that reason the less real? Nay, the calm, the quiet, the depth, were the very things which made it true, real, and abiding. Would it not have been utter madness, as well as profaneness, for St. John the beloved disciple, lying as he did in Jesus's bosom, to have grown weary of that highest honor, and hastened away to such refreshments as no doubt then abounded in Jerusalem? And yet this is the very thing young persons do, the very thing we all do, when we deliberately draw back from communion with Jesus Christ, under the notion of its being too solemn a thing, and requiring a further separation from worldly enjoyments than we are as yet willing to submit ourselves to. It is as if St. John, being invited to Jesus's bosom, had said "he was too young yet; it might be well enough for St. Peter and others, but he was as yet resolved to enjoy himself a little in the ordinary way of the world."

If, indeed, admission to this blessed sacrament had a necessary tendency to lessen your fear of God; if coming to it often, as not a few persons imagine, of course took away from your reverential thought of it when you came; that *would* be a reason for doubting about it sometimes. But can it be so? can it be that partaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, his body and blood, should ever make persons less reverential toward him? less like him in a deep devotional sense of the presence of the Almighty Father in their hearts? would those, who always come to the sacrament prepared, pass the time of their pilgrimage with less of godly and Christian fear, if they came twice in the same number of weeks wherein now they come once? I do not understand how this should be; and I do not believe that experience proves



it; although in matters of this kind, that is, in judging of other men's comparative religious character, I am almost afraid to appeal to experience at all. But, however, I think any one that pleases may, without presumptuous comparison, at once see enough to convince him, that those persons, who resolve by God's grace to communicate as often as they can, are not in general more wanting in the fear of God, than those who come more rarely.

I do not deny, that if a man got into a habit of deliberately coming with a profane and light mind, without sincere, actual self-examination and repentance, such a one would be the worse in the end for his frequent coming, for it would sear and harden his heart; and there is reason to fear, as the church intimates in one of her exhortations, that the devil might enter into him, the evil spirit get entire hold of him, as a punishment, especially, for such his profane conduct; and it may be that here and there such miserable cases do occur: but will any one say that this is any reason, why those who come in real humility, real well-meaning, however imperfect, should be afraid to come often? Surely the fault of those miserable persons arose from their approaching the holy table *profanely*, not from their approaching it whenever they had opportunity: nor, while the world stands, shall any one ever be able to show an instance of any person, who, coming reverently, and leading a good life, has been the worse Christian, merely because he came often. The feelings at the moment of communicating may not have been so strong and overpowering, but true goodness, a Christian heart and life, depend not on the feelings of the moment; and to stay away, for fear of losing some part of their keenness, is just giving up the substance for the shadow's sake.

Hitherto I have been speaking to young persons, and to persons of all ages, who shrink from communion with Jesus Christ, because they cannot thoroughly receive the saying, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." But it is not only in regard of the holy euchar-

ist, that such an evil temper continually betrays itself, even among those who seem free from gross sin.

Let us only recollect ourselves, how it is with us at our prayers. Are we not too much inclined to say them over without seriously bringing before our minds the awful presence of him to whom we pray? Do we always enough consider what we are doing, when we enter into our closet, and shut our door, and fall down on our knees before our Father which seeth in secret? We are, then, as we shall be when we die, alone with Almighty God and his holy angels. We are come close to his footstool, and his ear is inclined to hear us. Should we not use ourselves to consider this dreadful presence, if it were but for one moment, before we enter on the direct matter of our prayers?

At least, while we pronounce the words, Almighty, Everlasting God, we might try to recollect ourselves, and consider to whom we are speaking, and that every word we now speak is to pierce the clouds, and make its way through the darkness of God's throne, higher than ever angel or archangel could reach: we are speaking to God himself. And I suppose it is in order to accustom us to thoughts of this kind when we pray, that the church has from the beginning taught us to address him as Almighty, rather than by any other of his glorious attributes: the word Almighty, above all others, teaching and reminding us in what deep fear we should approach him, holding as he does so entirely in his hand our being, our life and death, our salvation and ruin.

This too is one of the reasons why outward religion, the religion of the body, is of so very great consequence; viz., that it helps very much to keep and improve in our hearts the true and wholesome fear of God. Therefore God himself does not disdain to give directions in holy Scripture, agreeing with the very feelings of our nature, which are in another sort intimations of his almighty will, as to what posture we should use, if our health allow, in praying to him. "O come, let us worship and fall down and *kneel* before the Lord our Maker." And

he has by his Holy Spirit declared, that the saints of old, when they prayed, kneeled down, and that our Lord and Savior himself fell prostrate on the earth. Because in truth not only does nature teach us to express our feelings in such postures, but also these very bodies of ours, so fearfully and wonderfully made, are of purpose so framed as to have an influence in their turn on our souls. Soldiers, we know, in all armies, are made to march erect, and to be firm and straight in all their bodily movements ; not merely for the appearance' sake, but because the very attitude, in some unaccountable way, tends to make them bolder and firmer in mind ; and in like manner there is no question, that kneeling and other humble gestures in devotion, practised not for form's sake, but in obedience to the church, and in the fear of God, would cherish and improve that very fear in our hearts : God having, as I just now said, ordered our frames so that the outward part, the body, shall always have more or less effect on the inward part, the soul ; whereby, he has given to every devout servant of his, a powerful instrument and help to true devotion, that is, the limbs and sense of his own body ; by the right use and ordering of which, we may every one of us do a great deal toward making ourselves better Christians.

And surely it is something very like human presumption, set up against the inspired word of God, when people make light of those outward and bodily services, and say, "the religion of the heart is everything : " as if he who must know us better than we do ourselves, had not appointed such outward devotion, on purpose to secure the religion of the heart.

Let us rather make up our minds, not to be too nice and subtle, in inquiring which of God's commandments are important, and which of small consequence ; when the mere fact of their being God's commandments makes them all of exceeding consequence. Let us leave off considering which of our fathers' good old religious customs we may best do without ; for that is too much like considering, with how little of piety and religion we may still get on tolerably well. One whose heart

was thoroughly possessed with a devout sense of the great things done for us by our Lord and Savior, would rather employ himself, I should imagine, in contriving how to make every work and purpose of his, every part of his life and conduct, in some way or other, a kind of offering to God ; which devout wish the early Christians used to express by signing themselves with the sign of the cross, on almost every occasion of life ; when they sat in the house, and when they walked in the way ; when they lay down, and when they rose up. Such customs if they begin from the fear of God, are very likely, by his blessing, to improve that fear in our hearts continually ; as, indeed, everything must do, which really reminds us of his unspeakable and most awful presence.

The excellent Bishop Wilson has said, speaking of small instances of self-denial, " Say not, it is a trifle, and not fit to offer in sacrifice to God." And the same may be said of small occasions of nourishing the remembrance of him ; of short prayers frequently through the day, of bowing the body at the sacred name of Jesus, of turning every event and accident of life, not openly, but as much as may be in secret, into an opportunity for devout prayer and recollection, " whose we are and whom we serve ;" where we are now, and whither we are fast going. Life is made up of such little things as these, and if these be regularly offered to Almighty God, in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, then the whole of life is offered to him : and no doubt he will bless the sacrifice, he will not despise the day of small things. He who gave an everlasting reward to the poor widow with her two mites, will look down graciously on the least and lowest offering, which the least and lowest of his people may humbly present to him : he will bless the willing mind, and fill it more and more with the spirit of his holy fear, that it may continue his for ever.

## SERMON XXVII.

KINGS TO BE HONORED FOR THEIR OFFICE SAKE.

PREACHED ON THE KING'S ACCESSION, 1836.

JEREMIAH XXIX. 7.

“Seek the peace of the city, whither the Lord hath caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”

THESE words are part of a letter which the prophet Jeremiah, remaining himself in Jerusalem, wrote by God's Holy Spirit to those of his countrymen, who had been carried away to Babylon before the rest. The immediate object of this letter was, to quiet any feverish restless hope, which they might entertain, of speedy deliverance from that their sad captivity: knowing themselves, as they did, to be God's own people, but not having anything like a true notion of the greatness of their sin, and of the punishment which they were to expect from their offended Father. Besides, they had among them, not a few false prophets and diviners, who did their best to encourage and flatter them in false hopes.

Therefore, Jeremiah was directed by the Holy Ghost to stifle at once all such deceitful expectations, and to bid them make up their minds to the spending seventy years in captivity, so that very few indeed of those to whom he wrote, might expect themselves to return to their own land. That was his immediate object; and, in the meantime, he gives them instructions how they should behave in the land of their captivity. They should regard it for the time as a kind of home; should patiently and contentedly make the best of God's visit-

ation. "Build ye houses and dwell in them; and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives and beget sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished."

Of course where they had their home, there they owed the duty of subjects. They owed peace and submission to the government, which protected them in so many comforts. Therefore it goes on as in the text: "Seek the peace of the city, whither the Lord hath caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace."

There is a remarkable correspondence, in many respects, between this advice of the prophet, and the apostolical advice of St. Paul to Timothy, and through him to the church of Ephesus (of which Timothy was bishop), and to the church generally in those times; which advice you will find is put first in the special service for this day. "I exhort that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." St. Paul is here directing the order of the church prayers, and the very first thing which he insists upon, is prayer for kings, and those in authority: and, according to his direction, the church, in all times, has made special mention of those high persons in the most solemn part of her service, that is, in offering up her solemn intercessions, with the sacred bread and wine, to the Most High, before partaking of the holy communion. She prays then as you know, for all Christian kings, princes, and governors, and especially for our gracious king.

Again, as the reason assigned in Jeremiah is, "In the peace thereof ye shall have peace," so St. Paul's argument, why Christians should pray for heathen governors, is, "That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

But how is it that this direction of St. Paul answers so well to the advice of Jeremiah in the text? Because the condition of those, to whom St. Paul wrote, answered very nearly to the condition of the Hebrews in Babylon, to whom Jeremiah wrote. Both were in a kind of captivity, the one under the king of Babylon, the other under Rome, which in our Lord's time and after stood in the place of Babylon, being the imbodyed representative and image of the power of this world, the anti-christian power, which in all times has set itself against the saints of the Most High. The kings, therefore, and persons in authority, for whom St. Paul here directs that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings, should be made by the church in her liturgy, were aliens and enemies to Jesus Christ and his gospel, persecutors and hinderers of the saving truth of God, and servants and agents, so far, of the evil spirit, just as much or more than Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon had been: and we know that Nebuchadnezzar not only worshipped idols himself, but made an image of gold, and proclaimed destruction by fire to every one, who should refuse to worship that image. But for Babylon and Rome alike, as you perceive, God's people were directed to pray. The church, in her intercessions, was to include all, because God included all in his gracious purposes of mercy, through Jesus Christ. He would have all men to be saved, and, therefore, we must pray solemnly for all; even from his enemies and the persecutors of his gospel. The infidelity and persecution of rulers made no difference in the loyalty of the subjects.

Nothing is more evident than this in the history of the early Christian church; her history, during those three hundred years which passed between the death of our Lord and the time when the Roman empire became Christian. All that time the church was persecuted more or less by the civil authorities, and Christians were in continual danger of their lives, for refusing to offer sacrifice to idols. Yet during the whole of that period, their conduct was such as is truly described in the

following words of an early writer : " How often do you, pagan emperors and powers, spend your rage upon us Christians! how often do your people attack us with stones and fires, and drag our dead bodies out of their very graves! Yet in what instance have you convicted us, bound together as we are, of any conspiracy against yourselves? and full as we are of a courage to endure even death, when have we made you, by any kind of suffering, pay for your injuriousness and cruelty toward us?" Nay, " for the safety of the Roman emperors, we call regularly not on idols, but on the eternal God, the true God, the living God:" " we pray continually for all emperors, that their life may be long, their authority entire, their home safe, their armies strong, their counsellors faithful, their people good and honest, the world under their government at rest; whatever a man, whatever a king would desire, these things we pray for on their behalf:" " the rather, because we are directed by our sacred books, to pray to God in overflowing kindness, even for our enemies and persecutors." " And this, although we are now more in number than any of your foreign foes; your cities, your islands, your strong holds, your very camps and senates are full of us: we might for strength, numbers, and spirit, be equal to any war whatever; but we have been taught in our school, that it is better to suffer death than to kill."

Such were the politics of the early, uncorrupt Christians; politics learned not of man, but of Jesus Christ and his inspired apostles.

And in this suffering, patient loyalty, the church went on, till it pleased God, that the kings and rulers of the world should themselves become Christians, that they should draw near with faith, and become nursing fathers and nursing mothers of the church, that is, head servants, especially trusted by her, and honored with the most glorious office of protecting and guiding her children: bearing them in their arms, according to Isaiah's prophecy, and bowing down with them in humble submission to that kingdom, which is above all, and which can never come to an end. For this, undoubtedly,



is the true meaning of that famous prophecy of Isaiah, so often quoted when, in this country, the union of church and state is talked of. "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers:" not nurses to the church herself, as if she were an infant requiring their care; but nurses to the children of the church, to the little ones of Christ, under the church's direction: the church herself being described, in the very same verse, as a triumphant queen, receiving the homages of these very kings, emperors, and powers of the earth: "They shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and shall lick up the dust of thy feet."

Something of this sort did once happen, when first, by God's gracious overruling wisdom, the Roman empire became the empire of our Lord, and of his Christ; there were occasionally good and pious monarchs, who did submit themselves and their counsels, in the way thus prophesied, to the guidance and judgment of God's church; yet so that, in general, the will of God, and the word of his prophet, were but partially and imperfectly accomplished. Throughout the Christian world, the Babylonian power, the spirit of worldly pride and ambition, has still for the most part, been too strong for the church; either corrupting her inwardly, as in Rome, or openly overbearing and vexing her, as in many other countries.

Our own country, perhaps, has been more highly favored than any others in modern times with a pattern of a king, who really did strive to act the part of a nursing father, not of the church herself, whose servant he knew himself to be, but of her children under her direction. That king was Charles the First, and we know what return he met with from the world.

But, generally speaking, the church history of England, like the rest of modern church history, is sadly blemished with encroachments, more or less flagrant, of the old Babylonian or Roman spirit; sometimes the bishop of Rome, and sometimes our own government, have opened their mouths to speak great things against

the authority of God's heavenly kingdom, set up for the correction and salvation of the whole world: although outwardly, that kingdom has ever been acknowledged, and we have not, at least till of late years, ceased to be, in profession, a Christian people.

All through this time, of course, it has been the duty and the practice of true Christian men, in this and all other countries, where Christ's name is honored, to seek the peace, prosperity, and welfare, each of his own country and government. Whether as a captive, or as a queen and mother, or as something between both, the true church has ever been loyal.

And so by God's blessing, she will continue to be, though her condition should become outwardly still more disadvantageous. It may be with some reason questioned at this moment, whether in this and some other countries, the church be not approaching near to a condition, not unlike that of the Jews in Babylon, or of the Christians under the heathen Roman empire. There is surely some ground to think, that if any of the old sainted fathers, who lived just after the empire became Christian, when worldly powers seemed truly to know their duty under the church; if any, I say, of those old sainted fathers could now rise and come among us, and see how we are going on in this country, he would say the church was in captivity, and had need to pay especial regard to the advice of Jeremiah and St. Paul, given to her in such circumstances.

For what is it but captivity, when the chief power over the church herself is given into the hands of the church's enemies? and is it not plain that in many parts of Christendom at present those who have, not perhaps professedly, but virtually, the ordering of things in the church, are, indeed, her enemies; are bound to be so, because they account her a false and dangerous thing? It is hard to speak on this subject, because it seems too much like bringing political discussion into the church; which is akin to profaneness, considering what political discussions generally are. But it is right, that as true churchmen, and, at the same time, loyal subjects of our

king, we should be aware of our real condition: and wishing not to utter a word of blame upon any one in particular, I do say, that God's providence, for our sins, has brought us to this; that the church of God is not free among us: she is in the hands of those who are more or less bound to be her enemies; they have power to make laws over her, power to manage, and if they will to take away, her property, that is, to deprive her of those lands and goods, which, not this country in general, but the piety of persons long since departed has endowed her with: and what is still worse, and must, one should think, be especially displeasing to the Almighty, these enemies of the church have also power, more or less direct, in appointing who shall be her bishops or chief pastors. The successors of the apostles, the heads and ordainers of all the clergy of God, may now, in many countries, calling themselves Christian, be really nominated and appointed by those who have neither part nor lot in the faith of the apostles.

Till of late it was not so among us: till of late this realm of England professed Christianity, so far as to make it necessary that those who were appointed to high places, and so had virtually the power of appointing bishops, must themselves, in profession at least, be Christian people, believers in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: but now that is all done away with; and it is surely not too much to say that, as churchmen, we are in captivity, since the enemies of the church have it in their power to do what they please with her property, to name whom they please for her ministers, and to make what laws they please for her conduct in her own internal concerns.

God forbid that such statements as these should be made in fretfulness or discontent. We ought to be too thankful that we have God's church among us at all; that we have pastors among us, churches to go to, time and leave to serve our Creator and Redeemer, without being in peril of our lives, as those first and best Christians were continually. We ought to be on our knees daily in humble acknowledgment to Almighty

God, that he has not quite taken his sacraments and his apostles' ministry from us. We have a gracious king, who, we well know, means nothing but good to the church: whose enemies are the church's enemies; whose person we are bound to honor, and as we may to uphold his right, at the risk, if need were, of our very lives. God knows, all this is far more than we deserve, considering how little use we and our country have hitherto made of those inestimable privileges. Not, therefore, in discontent and fretfulness, but in deep humiliation, sorrow, and fear, does it become a Christian person to meditate on the present captivity of the Christian church in this land. The sense of her condition should have the same effect on us, as the captivity of the Jewish church had on the holy prophet Daniel; it should put us upon seeking the Lord our God, with prayer, and supplication, and fasting, and sackcloth and ashes. Instead of going about boasting, as too many of our countrymen do, of the light and liberty, the wealth and glory of our land, we ought, as Englishmen, to be perpetually humbling ourselves in the dust, with the thought of the many wrongs and insults which our country is continually inflicting on the church of God. This is one plain duty, which the present aspect of things requires of us: to intercede for this whole realm, that it fall not quite away from the true faith and church, as more than one of the kingdoms of the earth have even in our own time.

Another duty, no less obvious in Scripture, is that which the text enforces on us: to seek the peace of the land in which our church is a captive; that is, by every means in our power (and all of us have it in our power in some small measure) to study the quiet and promote the welfare of our country, fallen though it be, and on its way to become a declared enemy of God's holy household. Do not say, "I am a private Christian, a poor needy helpless person; what can I do in this kind?" The very first duty in this kind is one in which you may bear a part, just as effectually as the greatest nobleman or the wisest counsellor in the land. Hear

St. Paul, what is his rule of politics: "I exhort that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, be made for kings and all who are in authority." Do not we all, rich and poor alike, pray for the king whenever we assemble here in church? and have you any doubt in the world, that the prayers of the poor are as effectual as those of the rich, in bringing down a blessing on his majesty, if both pray alike in the true fear of God?

I am afraid this is not enough considered. Persons pray for the king as in mere words of course, without much setting their mind on what they say; but they should consider how dangerous and frail the condition of an earthly king is, and how much he requires their prayers; their very charity, I had almost said compassion, will make them serious and devout in wishing God's peculiar grace both on his majesty and on all the royal family, as being all persons who are in peculiar danger.

Again, this we all know; that as we pray, so must we live, if we would not mock God instead of honoring him by our prayers. If therefore we pray for the king, our conduct must show that we honor the king: we must honor him, not merely as one in high authority, as one who keeps together the whole state, and is therefore most useful and necessary for keeping up that quiet and peaceable life, which all men, and especially all Christians, naturally desire; but we must honor the king apart from all use to ourselves, because he is the anointed of the Lord, a living type, if I may so speak, of the supreme dominion of Jesus Christ, as bishops are living types of his priestly and pastoral care: we must be loyal, self-denying servants of his majesty, not merely cool calculators how much more would be lost than gained, in the end, by any kind of rebellion. It is but an old, worn-out heathen notion, lately taken up by some moderns, that the great thing is love of one's country; and that if a man be full of that, it matters little whether he respect his king or no. The Bible holds a very different language: it says throughout, This is God's anointed, therefore he must be feared and

honored; God has made him an image of his majesty, has commanded us to pay tribute to him; let us perform that duty cheerfully. If we do not mean to mock our Creator when we pray for our sovereign, let us pay tribute with a willing mind, as to the Lord and not to man; and let us pay it scrupulously too, never doing anything to encourage the miserable and lawless ways of defrauding the revenue, which I fear are still too common, even among decent people. Much, very much might be said of such proceedings, and of their evil and bitter fruits: but surely to a Christian this one thing should be sufficient, that to uphold them is utterly contradicting our prayers for the king.

The same thing may be said of another most common transgression against loyalty: I mean speaking evil of dignities; which, however some appear to regard it as a matter of course, is placed by St. Peter among the worst symptoms of the very worst sort of people, "They walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed," they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. The same lawless kind of temper, which makes men greedy after forbidden carnal pleasures, shows itself also in making them impatient of the control of those whom God has set over them, and eager to express their impatience in mutinous words. We have not so learned Christ; and as we know that he expects us to be pure in heart, and for that purpose to keep our passions in very strict order, we know also no less certainly that he would have us obey those who bear lawful rule over us, and submit ourselves to them without reproach or railing; which conduct even if they do wrong us, would ensure us one advantage by them; the practice, namely, of self-command; by ruling our tongues, when tempted to speak evil of dignities, we should be the better able to rule our passions, when tempted to any other kind of disorder.

You cannot fail to see what follows from this dislike, so earnestly expressed on God's part, of all calumny and slander, and wilful abuse of kings and persons hav-

ing authority. You must perceive, that if there be any publications coming among us, whose very trade is to sin in this way, and foster the poor man's envy and discontent, by reporting and aggravating the crimes and follies of the rich; to possess us all with false proud notions of our own liberty and importance, by calling us as it were to sit in judgment on those whom God has made our superiors; such publications, however amusing, however full of useful information we may find or fancy them to be, are among the number of the devil's snares, whereby he would teach us his own sin of rebellion; and it cannot be very doubtful, I should think, what the first and best Christians would have done with them; who at one time, in the one town of Ephesus, burnt their own mischievous books and papers, to the cost of fifty thousand pieces of silver, rather than allow Satan to get an advantage over them.

In a word, one plain duty of loyalty is, to give no encouragement in any way to books, papers, speeches, or parties, which speak disrespectfully of the king's majesty, or try in any way to lessen or disparage his authority. This one rule, if observed by those only who now break it out of mere thoughtlessness, or without any bad intention at least, would soon make an extreme difference in our country's chance of peace and welfare. But as long as all persons will go on indifferently purchasing and reading all sorts of things; as long as rich and poor alike are content for the sake of *news*, to encourage treason, falsehood, and malice, so long we shall be "sowing the wind," and what can we expect but to "reap the whirlwind?"

Now if the mere denial of our own inclinations, in a matter of itself so insignificant as hearing and reading news, would make so much difference for the good of a falling church and state, how much more would we carry on the same wholesome principle of self-denial into all other parts of our conduct! What a blessing might we not hope for, on our king and country as well as ourselves, would we take care to live so that our prayers for them might be heard? We know what happened to

the highly-favored prophet Daniel, when he fasted and prayed for his own sins and the sins of his people ; an angel was sent from heaven on purpose to assure him that he was greatly beloved ; that his prayer was heard, and he, the angel, was come on purpose to instruct and comfort him as to the approaching deliverance of his captive people. The God of Daniel is still in heaven ; were there but a Daniel on earth to draw down the like angelical visitations by like self-denial, purity, and devotion of heart to the church and the king.

But far as we may and must be beneath that great saint, still our prayers, if sincere, and if accompanied by true penitence, will be heard, and will draw down their measure of blessing. We may not perhaps live to see the church restored from that captivity, in which those, who look beyond the mere outside of things, may now certainly perceive her to be sunk. Evil days may be in store for her ; evil, I mean, as far as outward appearances and the natural feelings of men go : the state, which now holds her in captivity, may before long quite cast her off ; and if so, will probably begin to persecute her, as did the Babylonians and Romans of old : then, though our trial will be severe, our duty will be plain : we must not return evil for evil : then, as now, we must pray for the state, and must seek its peace and welfare in all Christian ways ; although, what chance it can have of either without God's blessing, or how it should enjoy God's blessing, having thrown off his church, no man shall well be able to say.

Then, no more than now, need we to despair of the church, for with her, Christ has promised to be always, even to the end of the world. When we feel apt to despond at the sad fallings off, we see *everywhere around us*, and the tendency of our country, *as a country*, to throw off the yoke of God, at the same time that in some respects there is so great a show of religion ; when our hearts sink within us at these things, as sometimes they not unnaturally may, and we are inclined with the Psalmist to wish for the wings of a dove, that we might get away far off, and remain in some safe



wilderness ; then let us try, by a strong faith, to fix our hearts on that last promise of our Lord ; let us in thought place ourselves on that mountain in Galilee, where he by appointment met his eleven disciples, gave them their message and token to all nations—their message, his commandments ; their token, holy baptism—and pledged himself to be with them “always, even to the end of the world.” We of this church of England have that baptism, that commission, that promise. Christ then we are sure is with us ; for all our many and grievous offences we have not cast off him—his faith, his baptism. We have his warrant, by laying on of his apostles’ hands for what we do in his name : therefore we dare humbly hope, that whether our church stand out worldly high or low in the country, yet in the country God will permit her to abide : and as long as she is there, whether persecuted or encouraged, in whatever condition, she will pray for the king, and will serve him dutifully, and will count that person no true son of hers, who shall refuse to do the like. The church of England’s rule has always been, and by the blessing of God it always will be, “My son, fear thou the Lord and the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change.”

## SERMON XXVIII.

## THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS DAY.

PSALM xix. 5.

“In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun: which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course.”

THERE is no doubt that this verse describes the nativity of our Lord, and therefore the psalm which contains it was appointed not by our church only, but generally throughout the Christian world, as one of the proper psalms for Christmas day. For, says an old father of the church, “It was sung concerning Christ, seeing that we find it here written, he cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber. I think thou canst not fail to know whom the psalmist is here speaking of. He it is, who as a bridegroom, when the Word was made flesh, found his chamber in the virgin’s womb: there he joined or wedded to himself the nature of man, our nature: and from thence, as from a bridal bed, chaste and pure beyond expression, he cometh forth, in mercy humbled beneath all, in majesty mighty above all: for such is the psalmist’s meaning, when he says, he rejoiceth as a giant to run his course: he was born, he grew up, he taught, he suffered, he arose, he ascended: he ran on his course, he lingered not on his way.”

Thus the sun, that we see in the eastern heavens, is made to us an image of our incarnate Lord and Savior, issuing from the virgin’s womb to be the light and life of his church: and we are taught so to interpret the psalm, not by any fancy of our own, but by the express testimony of the Holy Spirit of God: for the Spirit of

God guided St. Paul's pen to apply certain words of this psalm, "Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world," to the preaching of the apostles: and not without the same Spirit, be sure, did the whole church from the beginning use the rest of the Psalm in the like high and spiritual meaning.

We are then to consider the rising sun as ordained of God to be a figure, token, or shadow, of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, born, as on this day, of the blessed Virgin Mary. Nor is it any new or strange thing, for Holy Scripture to give such a turn as this to the works of nature, the things which we see daily. The lessons which even children learn, out of what are accounted the plainest parts of the gospel, are enough to show that the whole world is full of parables. Take such a common thing as the growth and use of bread corn. Everything about it, the sowing of it, its silent growth, its mixture with tares and weeds, the harvest, the threshing floor, the winnowing fan, the leavening of it when ground into meal, the kneading of that meal into loaves, the breaking and eating of those loaves: all is made, in one gospel or another, or in the teaching of St. Paul, to bear a high and holy signification, to be a token of something relating to the kingdom of heaven. No wonder then, if so bright and glorious a creature as the sun rising in the heavens be also set forth to us as a token of something spiritual: and in fact we find that not in this place only, but elsewhere not seldom in the book of God, it is made the token of our Lord's most holy nativity. I will mention two instances in particular.

The prophet Malachi, providing God's people with comfort in that long silence of prophecy, which was to begin from his time (for he was the last of the old prophets) left with them, among many terrible warnings, this cheerful one, concerning the day of the gospel: "Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings." Where the glory of our new-born Lord is compared to the bright clouds, sometimes called "the wings of the

morning," which spread on each side and before the sun at his arising, and that with a healing, a refreshing power, driving away gloomy dreams, and encouraging all to go about their day's work cheerfully: and more than that, warming and kindling the benumbed world into a life not its own; as our Incarnate Lord, by his touch, brought life and healing to our nature which was dead in sin.

Thus far the prophet Malachi, in whom the voice of the prophetic spirit ceased for a while out of Israel. When it was heard sounding again, in the mouth of Zacharias, the father of St. John the baptist, it took up as it were the same note, like a person who had fallen asleep in the midst of some heavenly strain of music: I say, the voice of prophecy, on its awakening, presently began again to speak of our Savior, as of the sun arising in the east. "The day-spring from on high hath visited us: to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace." As yet it was only the day-spring, the morning twilight, because our Lord was not yet born: but his incarnation had been made known, it had been declared from heaven that he was already in that chamber, from which in a few months he "should go forth as a bridegroom, and rejoice as a giant," or strong warrior, "to run his course."

And here one may just notice by the way, what a light these texts of Scripture throw on that ancient custom of the church, to pray, if conveniently it might be, toward the east: a custom which as you know we still keep up, so far as this, that we turn to the east at the creed, and that the chancels of almost all churches are at the east end of the church, and the altar or table at the east end of the chancel. And on this matter I think it best to use the words of a great and good man of our own church, speaking on a subject very like this. "Such ceremonies," he says, "are most profitable against all who derogate from the honor of Jesus Christ; they show a reverent regard to the Son of God."

But to proceed: the sun in the heavens, especially the sun rising, being thus undoubtedly a sort of token or figure of God shining in the person of our Savior on the darkness of this world: what can we do better, now on his own day, than set ourselves humbly and thoughtfully to consider the deep doctrine herein contained, and the awful yet blessed duties, binding upon us all?

First then, every one may understand that as the sun is beyond comparison the brightest object in those outward and visible heavens, so the great privilege of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom and church of God's saints, is to have the Sun of righteousness, God made man, especially present, abiding and reigning in it. It is the kingdom and church of Christ: that is all its hope and glory. And the same is true of every soul which is inwardly and spiritually conformed to God's holy church; which has, as our Lord speaks, the kingdom of God within it. It is full of Christ: not of the name only and profession, of the shadow and fancy, of the dreamy and deceitful feeling, which some mistake for Christ; but of Jesus Christ himself, silently and mysteriously coming in and dwelling there; according to his own unspeakable promise, "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode in him."

Secondly, as Christ is a sun to his church by his glorious abiding in it, so the manner in which he came to be so is likened, you see, by the divine psalmist to "a bridegroom coming out of his chamber." He proceeded forth and came into the world out of the womb of the blessed virgin, where he had married, that is, united for ever, the nature of God to the nature of man, by taking on him our flesh, of the substance of that his blessed mother, and that without spot of sin, to make us clean from all sin.

Therefore St. John the Baptist calls him the bridegroom: St. John, who, before they were either of them born, had leaped in the womb for joy, at notice of Christ's having taken on him our flesh, which Scripture, you see, calls a divine marriage;—the same St. John, long

after, remembering and renewing the same awful joy, spake thus of Christ's person and office: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled."

In those words St. John rejoices, even as the angels rejoiced on Christmas morning: but in the text we are told of another joy, a joy on our Savior's own part.— "He rejoiceth as a giant to run his course:" and what sort of a course was it, as far as this world saw it? It began in poverty, and ended in a cruel death; began in a stable, and ended on the cross. He was "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:" his people, even his own relations, "hid as it were their faces from him;" he was "despised and they esteemed him not." True, his course was to end in "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom," but as far as it reached here on earth, he was altogether as one "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted:" and so he knew beforehand it would be. Yet to all this he bowed himself of his own accord; left in a manner that glory which he had with the Father before the world was, and stooped to be made perfect through sufferings; because it was his Father's will, and our salvation.

I wish we thought more of this, as often as any worldly wrong, or pain, or hardship, comes upon us. I wish we had at least so much thought of the cross of that Savior whose name we have so often in our mouths, as to take cheerfully that little portion of it which it may please him to lay on ourselves. Such patient cheerfulness would prove at last to have been the mother of great and holy joy; even as our Lord's willing obedience unto death was crowned with a name which is above every name. He rejoiced then as a warrior in his hard warfare: now he rejoices as a conqueror in his glorious kingdom.

For, as the psalmist goes on next to tell us, he is still in a certain sense running his course. He "goeth about," like the sun, "unto the uttermost part of the heaven,

and runneth about unto the end of it again, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." That is, our Savior, God, made man, born for us, and crucified, and risen again, fills the whole church and the whole world. He is everywhere among Christians, everywhere and in all times, in all the portions of his church, and in each single individual baptized into it, high and low, little and great, rich and poor, wise and foolish, nay, and I will add good and bad; since we learn from the catechism, that both are made members of him, and we have read in his own words, that there are branches in him which bear no fruit, and must be cut off; as well as those which the Father loves, and which he only corrects, that they may bring forth more fruit.

Thus is Christ whole in his whole church, and in every part and member of it; as the sun in the firmament shines impartially on the whole world beneath him and in his circuit visits each part in turn with his warming and life-giving beams. But Christ's faithful and considerate people are more particularly made aware of his presence by the outward means of grace, and the visible ordinances of his holy catholic church. Let us consider them one by one, and see if he be not especially present in each of them.

Look first at the book of God. Is it not full of Christ throughout? Is not he "the end of the law for righteousness?" To say nothing now of the New Testament, did not "all the prophets, from Samuel, as many as have spoken, likewise foretell of his days?" Are not the Psalms in honor of him, and therefore called "spiritual songs?" What were all the holy men of old, but so many types and figures of him? Was not Abel, in figure, Christ suffering; Noah, Christ preparing the church for the saving of his elect; Abraham, Christ as the father of the faithful; Isaac, Christ offered on the Mount; Joseph, Christ rejected by his brethren; Moses, Christ mediating between God and his people; Aaron, Christ sacrificing; Joshua, Christ victorious; Samson, Christ slaying his enemies in his death; David, Christ a king; Solomon, Christ anointed with the spirit of wisdom;

Jonah, Christ rising again? These, and many more than these, nay, the whole Hebrew nation, were but so many figures and pledges of him that was to come, in whom all should be summed up.

And now he is come, is not everything in the Christian world fuller of him than it had been in the Jewish world before? Are not our prayers, the prayers of the church, offered up wholly and only in his name? Is he not in the church ministry, with those his apostles, and the bishops and priests their successors, with whom he has promised to abide even unto the end of the world? Certainly, St. Paul speaks always as if Christ were so among us: as where he says, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." And again, "when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ." And again, "since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in us, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in us." Christ is therefore in every true minister of his, in every act of his ministerial office.

Observe also if he be not, in a remarkable manner, in the holy days and times of his church, from one end of the year to the other. The Sunday we know is his own day, called from the beginning by his name, the Lord's Day. Circumcision, Epiphany, Ascension, and other such days; they too are plainly his days, for they are kept in remembrance of great things done or suffered by him. And are not the days of his saints, his days also? They are so accounted by the same wise and holy writer, some of whose words I a little before mentioned. Hooker says, "these days and times have all relation to one head." Again, he adds, "Forasmuch as we know that Christ hath not only been manifested great in himself, but great in other his saints also, the days of whose departure out of this world are to the church of Christ as the birth and coronation days of kings and emperors; therefore, especial choice being made of the very flower of all occasions in this kind, there are yearly times chosen to meditate of Christ glorified in them" (he means the Holy Innocents) "which



had the honor to suffer for his sake, before they had age and ability to know him; glorified in them, which knowing him, as Stephen, had sight of that before death, whereunto so acceptable death did lead; glorified in those sages of the East, that came from afar to adore him, and were conducted by strange light; glorified in the second Elias of the world sent before him to prepare his way; glorified in every of those apostles whom it pleased him to use as founders of his kingdom here; glorified in the angels, as in Michael; glorified in those happy souls that are already possessed of heaven." Thus it appears that our Lord and Savior is in all the bright days of the church, as the sun in heaven in all those of the year. His light shines reflected in them all. He goeth about unto the one end of his heavenly kingdom, and runneth about unto the other end of it again—from Christmas to Whitsuntide, and from Whitsuntide to Christmas again, and there is nothing hid from the heat and life which he gives.

Again, Christ is in all sorts of persons in his church, as he was in his prophets of old, in their several ways. He is in kings, because they are the Lord's anointed, as he was: in the poor, because what is done to them, he reckons done to him: in marriage, because it is a token of the mystical union betwixt him and his church: in the sickness and pain of his people, because they, like St. Paul, do thereby fill up what remains of the affliction of Christ in the flesh.

Lastly, and perhaps one ought to say above all, Christ is in his holy sacraments; in baptism, that we may be made members of him, and truly and really put him on: in the holy communion, because therein, as we are taught in the catechism, those who are faithful, verily and indeed take and receive his body and blood. Now, baptism is the root and ground of the Christian life, and the eucharist, in this world at least, is its top and crown. From the root, therefore to the crown, from the beginning to the end, that may be said of our Lord in his kingdom, which the wise son of Sirach affirms of Al-

mighty God in all his works: "We may speak much, and yet come short: wherefore, in sum, he is all."

Such is the doctrine taught us by the comparison, which the church and the Scriptures teach us to make between the sun in his tabernacle in heaven, and the eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ, in the tabernacle of that blessed body, wherewith, as on this day, he showed himself first both to men and angels, to save the one, and be glorified by the other. Such, I say, is the doctrine of Christmas day; it is as it were a clear, musical note, sounded at this blessed time, in harmony with which are to be all our praises of Almighty God, and all our holy services throughout the year. The doctrine is given in two words by the apostle, where he says, concerning the church, that in it "Christ is *all* and *in all*." Christ is *in* every person, and he is every person's *all*.

I will conclude with a few plain thoughts about our own duty and practice, suggested by these two most certain, yet most mysterious and unspeakable truths.

First, if, according to our profession as Christians, we really regard the most holy Jesus as our *all*, surely we shall never wilfully miss an opportunity of coming to him, of prevailing on him to come more and more to us. I fear we are sometimes tempted to think, that, provided the great concern be as we think going on well with us—provided we belong as yet to Christ—we have no occasion to trouble ourselves about this or that church ordinance, this or that mean of communion with him; and so we permit ourselves to indulge our natural sloth, and miss many a holy prayer, and the meaning of many a wholesome lesson of the Bible, and fail of our part in many a good work, all of which a little trouble, a little self-denial, a little devout care, would have secured to us.

Thus we do, forgetting that Christ's treasure of mercies is infinite; that however near he is now to any of his saints, he may and will be infinitely nearer, when that saint shall have served him longer and more faithfully. His promise, "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him," never can come to an end; it remains to be still more and more accomplished, the more

completely any one, using his grace, shall learn to love him and keep his word. Surely it is a poor kind of faith, a meager hope, a cold charity, when a man, forgetting all this, can find it in his heart to say, "I shall not attend such and such a holy service; I shall not communicate such a day, though I might; I shall not take any part in such and such a good work: for why? I do not think it necessary, I trust I am in a good and safe way without it." We know not what we trifle with, what we throw away, when we permit ourselves to speak and act thus.

Much more, when we not only neglect opportunities of coming to him, who is our all, but even drive him away from us, otherwise being near; or rather, turn his gracious presence into condemnation. God give us grace to think of this, the next time we are tempted to unclean, malicious, covetous, or repining thoughts. Let us not only dread the present sin, but much more the affront to him, in whom we spiritually live, and move, and have all our Christian being. If we drive him away, to whom shall we go to save us?

Taking now that other half of St. Paul's account how Christ is the sun of his church, namely: that he is not only all things—light, and heat, and life, and comfort, to each particular person; but also that he is *in* all—there is no Christian who is not partaker of him: this will give us deep thoughts of our duty to our neighbor, as the other, of our services paid to Almighty God. It is a remarkable saying of St. Peter, "Honor all men." Do not only deal kindly with them, but really respect and honor them. Why? Because they are made after the image of God. By the same rule, and more, the meanest Christian must be honored, because he bears Christ about with him; even as a certain holy man of old, Ignatius, the friend of St. Paul and St. Peter, told the Roman emperor when about to pass sentence upon him. The emperor asked him, "What signifieth the title you are called by? and to whom belongs it?" "It belongs," replied the saint, "to all who carry Jesus Christ in their bosoms." "Do you mean," inquired the empe-

ror, "that person who was crucified in the time of Pontius Pilate?" "Him," replied Ignatius, "I mean who nailed upon his cross both the sins which I have committed, and the being that led me to commit them, and who hath decreed that all spiritual craft and malice shall be put under the feet of them who carry him in their bosoms." "Do you, then," asked the emperor, "carry a crucified man within you?" Ignatius answered, "I do: for it is written: 'I will dwell within them, and I will walk among them.'" It was no special holiness of his own that this blessed saint was speaking of; he would not so have praised himself: but he was speaking of that which is common to all Christians, did they but know their own happiness: Jesus Christ dwelling in them by his holy Spirit.

We see, then, that in honoring them we are honoring him: loving them, we are loving him: in going out of our way to serve them, we are making a little sacrifice to him, who thought not his life too dear to be parted with on the cross for our salvation. And the common saying, "For Christ's sake," is more exactly founded on truth than we perhaps have considered. For, indeed, Jesus Christ is in those who use it, whoever they are, and however unworthy, if they be Christian people; and we must reverence them, and do the best we can for them, not only for the sake of pity and kindness, but also for the sake of Christ abiding within them.

And let us also seriously consider, what a thing it must be in any way to defile or corrupt the bodies and souls, in which our gracious Lord so vouchsafes to dwell.

May the good spirit of God write in all our hearts high and true thoughts of our calling, as this holy day declares it to us; viz., that our Lord and Redeemer is truly present in every one of us, to be all in all, if we refuse him not; that so, keeping church unity in this world, we may come to perfect union with him in heaven.

And if it should please God to preserve our life

through that year which will soon begin, may we so live during that year, that we may find ourselves next Christmas to have really made a step in that blessed journey.

I will end with a short collect, which was formerly used in the Church of England at the morning communion on Christmas day:—

“O God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of thine only Son Jesus Christ: grant, that as we joyfully receive him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our judge: who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.”

## SERMON XXIX.

## CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURATION.

PREACHED ON TRINITY SUNDAY.

ST. MARK ix. 7.

“And there came a cloud and overshadowed them: and there came a voice out of the cloud, This is my beloved Son; hear him.”

THOSE who read the Gospels with attention, and compare them one with another, can hardly help observing a remarkable agreement between the account of our Lord's transfiguration, of which these words are a part, and the account of his baptism by St. John, which the church appoints to be read as one of the lessons for to-day. In both there is something very unlike the ordinary course and tenor of our Lord's life on earth among men: in this respect, that whereas generally his divine glory was under a veil, his humiliation and low estate open to the eyes of all, in these two examples, and perhaps in a very few others, the opposite of this is the truth: he appears all over encompassed with majesty and brightness, only some faint shade appearing of his being yet in the form of a servant.

Then, if we compare the circumstances of the two events; the one came just before his temptation, the other, just when he was addressing himself, more openly, to prepare his disciples, and if one so may speak, himself, for his bitter cross and passion.

The one, the visible glory and voice at his baptism, came to him as he was praying; the other, the change which is called his transfiguration, found him in the act of prayer.

Both were before chosen witnesses; the one, as it

seems, St. John Baptist only : the other, the three great apostles, and the two great prophets. In both it seems to have been part of our Lord's design to set forth the agreement between the law and the gospel ; in his baptism, where he said, "it became him to fulfil all righteousness," even ceremonial ; at the transfiguration, by the appearance of Moses and Elias, the law and the prophets, as it were conferring with him who came not to destroy, but to fulfil them.

In both, the same message was brought to men's ears, concerning the Son of man, by the voice of the Almighty Father : the only difference being, that in the one instance, the baptism, the voice spoken seems to have been to our Lord : "*Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased ;*" in the other, the transfiguration, it was spoken to the disciples of him : "*This is my beloved Son : hear him.*"

Finally (and this is the reason why I have selected this passage for consideration to-day), in both these marvellous events, if I mistake not, there was a manifestation, even to men's outward senses, of the whole Divine Trinity. In the case of the baptism, this is apparent ; the voice of the Almighty Father being heard from heaven, the Son appearing incarnate on earth, and the Holy Ghost descending on him in a bodily shape like a dove ; which is, of course, the reason why the passage is selected as one of the lessons for the day. In the transfiguration, the presence of the holy Father and of the blessed Son, is marked too plainly to be mistaken : the Father by his voice, showing himself to the ears of those his chosen witnesses, the Son incarnate showing himself in their sight with his glorious body. But the presence of the Holy Spirit is not so distinctly marked. I conceive, however, according to a conjecture of one of the old fathers of the church, that God the Holy Ghost, the third person in the blessed Trinity, did then and there manifest himself in the bright cloud which overshadowed the disciples. The same cloud or pillar of glory, had been the token of his presence at the Red sea : when he went between the host of the Israelites

and their enemies, and was a cloud and darkness to the one, but gave light by night to the others: and, afterward, in their march through the wilderness, the same cloud resting over the tabernacle door, or moving onward, showed them when to rest or move. And to this Isaiah seems to allude, when he particularly mentions among God's mercies to the Israelites, that "he put his Holy Spirit within them:" and in another place, where he says of them in their sinful stubbornness, that "they rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit."

The same cloud of glory, as is well known, was the especial token of God's presence both in the tabernacle and in the temple. Of the tabernacle, it is said, when it was first finished, and God did, as it were, take possession of it, and begin to inhabit it; "a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." In like manner, when the temple was builded, and Solomon was in the act of dedicating it, "the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister, because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord:" the same glory which was shown in part to Moses, when God passed by him on Mount Horeb; the same glory which filled the temple, spreading round the throne of God like a train, when Isaiah had that wonderful vision of the seraphim, singing, "Holy, holy, holy."

I say, on comparison of all the places, this visible light or glory evidently was the outward sign of the presence of the Holy Ghost, the invisible Spirit of God the Father, and of Christ; and, therefore, the apostle, speaking of the passage of the Israelites through the Red sea, as a figure or type of Christian baptism, says, "They were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." He means, as Christians are baptized into Christ by water and the Spirit: the cloud answering to the Spirit, and the sea to the water of baptism.

All this being so, it seems most reasonable to believe, that the bright cloud into which the glorified Jesus entered with Moses and Elias, was the token of the same Holy Spirit, overshadowing them with the same dove-



like motion as when he came hovering over our Lord at his baptism ; and, therefore, although the name of the Comforter is not mentioned, we may well regard the transfiguration as one of the occasions, on which the whole blessed Trinity graciously condescended to reveal itself to mankind : the more so, as the time and manner of the cloud's appearing were exactly suited to represent to the apostles, the time and manner of the Holy Spirit's coming down from heaven, to reveal the whole gospel of Christ. The voice, declaring Jesus to be the beloved Son, came not from heaven, until the bright cloud had overshadowed them : even as the great mystery of the gospel, the one Godhead of the Father, and the Son, with the communion of saints, was not fully revealed, until the Holy Ghost had come down from heaven, and actually set up the church : according to the promise of our Lord, " At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."

The bright cloud being thus supposed to betoken God the Holy Ghost, personally present in his church, we may, perhaps, perceive, that the whole course of things which took place at our Lord's transfiguration, is well fitted to represent, to a thoughtful mind, no small part of the counsel of God in his church. St. Peter seems to imply as much, when speaking of what he then saw, he says, " We were eyewitnesses of his majesty." The word which stands for eyewitnesses, in St. Peter's own original writing, means " persons admitted to see with their eyes some great and awful secret of religion." And some portion of the secret which was then revealed to St. Peter and the rest, he has himself told us. They had made known to them " the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." He appeared to them in his glorious body, such as he appeared after his resurrection, such as he will appear to us all at the great day. He appeared in conference with Moses and Elias, concerning his decease, which he was soon to accomplish at Jerusalem : whereby is represented to the thoughts of all men the agreement of Moses, that is, the law, Elias that is, the prophets, and the gospel of our Lord

Jesus Christ himself, in the great doctrine of his death and sacrifice for the salvation of the world.

And what if the sleep of the apostles, which hindered them at first from seeing the glory, and from which they were only awakened by our Lord's touching them, and by his gracious voice, saying, "Arise, and be not afraid:" what, if this sleep of St. Peter, St. James, and St. John, be a token and type of the sleep of death, which is one day to overtake us all, and from which no child of Adam can be awakened, except by the touch and voice of the Son of God made man? His voice, which the dead, he promised, should hear and live: his touch in the most holy eucharist, whereby his very body and blood is mysteriously received, to be a pledge of resurrection, a seed of immortal life to our vile bodies.

And whereas, after the voice was past, they looked up and "saw no man, save Jesus only:" is not this a lively representation of the condition of Christian men, walking by faith and not by sight; only seeing around them, with their very bodily eyes, the tokens of the presence of him who was made man for us, and through whom only they can ever hope to know God as they are known?

In all these particulars (and others, perhaps, might be found), the Transfiguration of our Lord does seem, as though it were intended to show forth a good deal of God's gracious way of saving us by his Son and Spirit; a good deal of the awful mystery of the holy, blessed, and glorious trinity, three persons and one God. If so, it becomes us reverently and faithfully to examine the circumstances, which, by God's providence, accompanied that wonderful revelation: if, haply, we may find help in ordering our minds and hearts and tongues rightly, when we are speaking or thinking of these secrets of the highest heaven.

Thus, when we think of the particular time at which it pleased God thus to reveal himself, we seem to perceive what kind of preparation is required for those, who would think worthily of him and his gospel. The doctrine of the cross must go before: even as our Lord,

a week before his transfiguration, had spoken more clearly than usual to St. Peter and the rest, of his approaching sufferings; and when St. Peter had rebuked him, he had explained to them, that, *as* his followers, they too must expect to suffer: they must deny themselves, and take up the cross: they must be willing to lose their lives for his sake: they must prepare for such trials, as would make many ashamed of him and his words. Thus prepared, and not before (for our Savior waited a full week for them to consider that warning, and so went up into the mountain), they were fit to see "the kingdom of God come with power;" that is, to see this glorious rehearsal of the setting up of the church, which was exhibited to them on the mountain.

Would you then know the true gospel? do you desire to draw near the glory of God, and to know something, as the saints know it, of the way of salvation, the secrets of the most holy trinity? You must begin by denying yourself. Christ crucified is the corner-stone, the foundation of the building of true faith: that is, not simply believing that he died for you, and trusting to be saved by his merits; *that*, in comparison, is an easy kind of faith, and has been felt by many an impenitent sinner: but the faith which must bring you, as an apt scholar, to the mountain where Christ is glorified, must be joined with real self-denial.

And here, I suppose, we may see reason to fear, lest our time,—which is a time, generally speaking, of much religious talk, and, as I should suppose, not a time in which there are (speaking by comparison,) very many open unbelievers,—should be little, if at all, better than times past, in respect of true devotion and goodness. There is danger, lest men should come to the mountain, without first bowing themselves down to take up the cross: lest they should approach the most holy doctrines, profess their faith in them, talk freely about them, without in earnest trying to deny themselves. Would it not be well, if we would first endeavor to take up Christ's yoke, in such a plain simple matter as fasting and abstinence, and denial of our bodily appetites?

if we would prepare for Sunday, by keeping Friday? Is it not sad to see persons come straight from their pleasures and amusements, without any special preparation, to the most holy things, and yet not at all ashamed and humbled in conscience? Is it any wonder, if the high and holy truth do many of us rather harm than good, when we thus approach it with unprepared, it may be with unclean hearts.

Observe who they were, whom our Lord chose out, in paradise and in earth, as the fittest to be honored with this bright glimpse of his majesty. They were the three apostles, who had especially set the example of leaving all and following him: and the two prophets, Moses and Elias, most remarkable for miraculous fasting, each forty days and forty nights, by way of type of his mysterious fast in the wilderness. Is not this a hint, that penitent, humble, self-denial,—fasting, not outwardly only, but in heart, is the only preparation for high Christian knowledge? So the church of God has ever believed and taught? And in proportion as her children have swerved from that faith and teaching, there is reason to fear that their faith in the atonement of our Lord, and in the rest of the divine gospel, has been more in word and in tongue, than in deed and in truth. As in St. Paul's time, so also now, Jesus Christ crucified, that is, the taking up our cross and following him practically, in fasting and abstinence, in mortification and self-denial, must be the foundation on which the faith of high doctrines must be built.

Good helps to the same purpose are solitude, retirement, silence; the love of God's own holy and favored places; and, most especially, earnest, regular, humble prayer. Thus our Lord took his disciples into a high mountain *apart*: as much as to teach, that those who desire to see the kingdom of God come with power, have need in the first place to withdraw themselves from outward things. Why do we naturally hide our faces, when we are in deep and earnest prayer? Is it not because nature herself teaches us, that we cannot

set our hearts on two things at once ? that if we look up toward heaven, we must look away from earth ?

The angels who watch our behavior, both in church and out of church—do you not suppose, that if one of us could ask them why there is so little earnest and solemn devotion to be seen in many Christian congregations ; why God's people seem ashamed to kneel before him ; why there is so little difference made between God's holy house, and any other room : they would tell you that the reason is, our being so little used to remember God and his dreadful presence out of church, and when we are engaged in the ordinary duties of life ! And, again, if we could ask them why we find it so hard to lift up our hearts above the world, and go about our daily tasks with a single eye to God's glory, would they not say it was greatly owing to our taking so little pains about composing our minds and bodies to the one only business of worshipping our Maker, when we are in the house of worship.

Depend upon it, the two go together ; the heavenly mind out of church, and the heart and behavior full of fear and reverence in church : God will bless you if you pray and labor for *both*, but not if you depend on either apart from the other.

If you would truly know, and not only knowingly talk of, the mysteries of the church of Christ, you must go *regularly apart* to pray ; you must not depend on chance opportunities and moments of leisure, as many do. He who seeks God in earnest, and stands any chance of being called his friend, will do as Abraham did, who was honored with that glorious title : he will have certain times and places, where he will stand regularly before the Lord ; he will not expect to see anything of Christ's mysteries, except he have looked for them in prayer, and in holy retirement, as it were, in the mountain apart.

Again, you will observe, that the transfiguration of our Lord was that which led the way to this train of heavenly wonders : his human body was glorified for a while in their sight, and so his divine nature, and the glory also of the whole ever-blessed Trinity, became in

a manner visible to the disciples. And is it not so, that through the body of our Lord, his glorified body, all the wonders and graces of the gospel are even now communicated to Christian men? We are made members of Christ, that is our beginning; we are baptized into his body: and by the sacrament of the Lord's supper, we are more and more incorporated with him, in the blessed communion of saints. We know him first as man, by the gracious and endearing histories which we read of him in our childhood: as we grow older, we discern and feel, what the church all along taught us to confess in words, that he is not only perfect man, but also perfect God, sent of the Father, sending the Spirit; and so through him we are introduced to the whole glorious and divine Trinity.

Let us then honor and revere Christ's holy sacraments, not merely as edifying ordinances, but as the very means whereby we are partakers of the man Christ Jesus, and through him, partakers of the divine nature, communicants with the whole sacred Trinity, the Father and the Son coming to us, and making their abode in us by the Holy Spirit.

Another condition of this holy fellowship is, that we thankfully receive the whole of God's dealings with man, the law and the prophets, as well as the gospel of the kingdom. Some persons, rather presumptuously, will be making differences in the holy Scripture, and confining their attention to the Epistles (for example) of St. Paul, while they treat the other holy books with comparative neglect. But, surely, the only difference which a truly loyal worshipper of Christ can well discern between the honor due to one book and to another is this; that he will honor those books most, in which the Son of God speaks most in his own person; that is, the holy gospels: other distinctions he will hardly permit himself to make.

Now, this great mark of the right faith, that it receives the whole Bible impartially, reverencing and adoring God's great name as sincerely in those parts which seem at first hard and unedifying, as in those which come

home to men's hearts ; and not forgetting God's elder servants, and his mercies of days long past, in the brighter and nearer glories of the perfect gospel :—this mark, I say, of the true faith, our Lord, at his transfiguration, was pleased to recommend to us, by the appearance of Moses and Elias, with himself in glory. It was a very signal token of that love, by which the Almighty Savior embraces all generations of his people : the law and the prophets, as truly as us Christians. It was a plain lesson to us, that one great preparation for a right belief in the high mysteries of Christ, will be to have a heart full of affectionate reverence toward the saints of the Old Testament : to study, day and night, the law, the Psalms, and the prophets.

Again : we see by St. Peter's manner of speaking, that Almighty God is most willing to reveal his secrets, such as this of the holy Trinity, not so much to great scholars, men of high and deep understanding, as to those of a simple and lowly mind ; such as St. Peter showed, when in his affectionate zeal he cried out, " Lord, it is good for us to be here ! " and proposed to make the three tabernacles. He spake, indeed, in fear and wonder, not well knowing what he said : but is not this a plain proof, that God Almighty encourages such to come near to him, and will reward them with the knowledge of his high mysteries, not looking to their much or little learning or wisdom, but to their sincere and humble minds ?

A further instruction, which we seem to learn from this account of our Lord's Transfiguration, is this : that the knowledge of gospel mysteries, rightly considered, is a most awful thing, and that the only support which can enable frail mortals to bear it, is communion with Jesus Christ. The awfulness of Christian knowledge we learn, in that when the Son was transfigured, when the Father's voice was heard from heaven, when the Spirit in a bright cloud (for so I suppose) overshadowed them, they sank, as Daniel, when he saw a bright vision, " in a deep sleep on their face to the ground. " The only support which can enable frail man to endure such brightness unharmed, is pointed out, when we read that

“Jesus came and touched them,” and said, “Arise, and be not afraid.” It is the touch of the Son of God incarnate; it is actual communion with his blessed body, which enables penitent yet still frail sinners to look toward the Almighty and All-wise, without being oppressed by the glory.

Therefore it is that those who despise the sacraments, if they think of divine things at all, are sure to fall into some heresy; they have not the strengthening touch of Jesus Christ, the light and strength which flow only from communion with him; they are left, so far as we know, to their own natural courage and wisdom, to contend against the evil and seducing spirit; and we all know what is sure to happen, when in that war man is left to himself.

But lest any one, hearing or reading of the great and high mysteries contained in the gospel of our salvation, should begin to expect too much, that is, should look for fuller assurance, clearer light, concerning either God himself or any of his doings, than the condition of this world affords: mark what follows next. “When the voice was past, Jesus was found alone.” “When they lifted up their eyes and looked, they saw no man save Jesus only with themselves.” As much as to say, that after all, the greatest saint must still expect to walk by faith not by sight; and to find such walking a severe trial and temptation. We all the days of our life, are as then the three apostles were in the immediate peculiar presence of the most holy Trinity: the Father and the Son, by the Spirit, actually, as he foretold by the prophet, “dwelling in us and walking in us.” But we see no such thing: we only see the church, the ministers, and sacraments, and Scriptures of Jesus Christ, which are as it were himself present with us, to touch us, and make us continually aware of the fearful unseen glory, with which we are encompassed. In this sense, although the whole Trinity is with us, yet that may be truly said of us, which when the voice was past was said of the three disciples, that “Jesus is found of us alone:” we see with our eyes, we hear, we touch, our hands may



handle, the proof, both by sacraments and by other church ordinances, of our Lord and Savior's abode on earth in his sacred body : and through that knowledge, and by the help of those ordinances, we come to know the secret things of our Lord. Therefore let no man expect too much, either of spiritual joy, or of quiet and peace in believing. He may, he must, lift up his eyes to heaven in faith ; but let him not, while this world lasts, look for that clear knowledge of saving doctrines, which may be fitly compared to *light*.

Finally, the history of the transfiguration may show us what holy reserve God expects men to practise, in communicating the high mysteries of Christ to the world. "Jesus said, 'Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again.'" It was not to be told : the holy mysteries are not to be rudely cast like pearls before swine, that is, made matter of conversation with all sorts of people, pious and thoughtful, self-willed and humble.

It is true, as times are now, one can hardly keep very unworthy persons from knowing the sayings which convey the knowledge of the trinity, and of other great and awful secrets in religion. But we may keep from wantonly discoursing of such things ; we may keep silence even in our own thoughts, not rashly either speaking or conjecturing about the most holy trinity ; never forgetting, very often expressly adoring.

In two words, would we know how best to behave ourselves in respect of these heavenly truths, which are but half revealed, yet the life of our souls depends on our entirely believing them ; let us try to be minded as the two great apostles were ; neither of whom ever after lost the remembrance of what he had seen in the mount ; and how they remembered it, themselves have told us : St. John found in it great help to look steadily by faith and love on the face of God incarnate : "the Word," says he, "was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and *we beheld* his glory." Again, St. Peter found in the recollection of the same moment a sure and certain pledge of the second coming of our Lord ; his words are, "We

have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. . . For the voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."

With those great apostles, and with all saints, let us give glory to our transfigured Lord : to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be all honor and glory, all praise and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

## SERMON XXX.

SAINTS ARE LIKE SPARKS IN STUBBLE.

PREACHED ON ST. ANDREW'S DAY.

ST. JOHN i. 42.

"He first [*πρωτος*] findeth his own brother Simon."

WE are now come to the end of one more year of the church Sundays and holydays. For another twelve-month we have had the church open, not only on the one day in the week which all who call themselves Christians at all, think themselves bound in some sort to keep holy, but also on those other days on which the Prayer Book directs us to remember the holy saints and martyrs of old, both for their good example's sake, and also in token of our continued communion by faith with that blessed company who have gone before us into paradise. We have tried to honor God in them as the holy church directs; but some persons would be apt to say, we have tried it with very little profit. Few, very few, were those among us who at first showed any disposition to take part in this service—and few, very few, they continue still. If one judged of such matters by outward appearance, or looked anxiously to any present visible effect, surely one should be much tempted to leave off these saints' day services altogether, or substitute for them something else, which should draw more people, and seem to do more good.

But, in the first place, the rule of the church is plain. We cannot leave off these services, without direct and manifest disobedience to the Prayer Book. They are as distinctly ordered in that book, as the service of the Sunday itself.

In the next place, to leave off any service, *merely* be-

cause we do not see the good effects of it, supposing it to be otherwise right, seems not well to agree with the first principle of all goodness—*faith*. Think of the great example of all. Jesus Christ hanging on the cross ceases not “all day to stretch forth his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people.” If the church be truly crucified with him (and that is the very pledge and seal of her being), she, too, must be content to do the same. She is not to cease stretching forth her hands, because her children are disobedient and gainsaying: not though they were all such.

And what if but few come? who can tell how much good the Almighty may have wrought, or may one day purpose to work, in and by some one or more of those few, who are able and willing to come? Who knows what ample growth, what abundant fruit may be given to some seed of truth and grace, scattered, as to men it would seem, almost at random, on such an occasion as this? an occasion which the world in general agrees to pass by in such utter neglect.

Let us just look to the history of the saint whose memory we this day honor. So it is, that he comes first in the list, of whom divine Providence has caused *that* to be set down, which may most encourage us in continuing such services as these, however little countenance we generally find for them.

St. Andrew is the first of the Apostles whom the church commemorates. Look now into the Scripture notices of St. Andrew, and see how he first came to Christ. Was it not by a kind of providential chance? by what the world, speaking humanly, would call a kind of happy accident? In the same sort of way as if any one person, coming here regularly when he could, on Saints' day as well as on Sundays, should *happen* (so we speak, but we know what it means) to hear something in the collect, or lessons, or sermon, which might just meet some spiritual want of his, and do him good for ever?

For thus it was:—St. Andrew, being a disciple of St. John the Baptist, *happened* to be standing with him one

day, not long after St. John had come to the knowledge that Jesus was the Christ, by the voice which came from heaven, and the Holy Ghost which descended on him at his baptism. St. Andrew *happened* to be one of two, who heard St. John at sight of our Lord utter those memorable words, which the Holy Ghost, probably by their witness, has preserved for the church to all generations. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." So hearing, they both followed Jesus, and abode with him that day: and what he saw and heard, together with St. John's testimony, convinced him that this was indeed the anointed of the Lord, the promised Savior. It prepared him to forsake all that he had, when the same Jesus not long after called on him to do so, and to become a fisher of men. Thus the gathering of Christ's people began: not by any overpowering manifestation of him, such as one might expect after the wonders of his baptism, but privately and quietly, and, as we should say, by accident.

And as this gathering began, so also it went on. The very next thing we read is, that St. Andrew "first found his own brother Simon," he who was afterward the beloved Apostle St. Peter, and "brought him to Jesus," assuring him that he was the Christ. Both of them as it may seem, both St. Andrew and the other whose name is not mentioned, went to look for St. Peter; knowing no doubt his zealous, earnest, dutiful temper, they wished to lose no time in making him partaker of the glad tidings. Both most likely looked for him, but St. Andrew his brother found him first.

Here the same word, *findeth*, is used again, as also twice afterward in the continuation of the same narrative: in the calling, first of St. Philip and afterward of Nathanael. "The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and *findeth* Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me." The Holy Ghost seems on purpose to have guided the pen of the holy Evangelist so, as if he should say, "Christ being on the point of departure into Galilee, it so *happened*, that just before his departure he fell in with Philip:" who being of Bethsaida had, perhaps,

heard something of him from Andrew and Peter, both of whom were of the same place; and was the readier to listen to the call, when directly given.

Again, he goes on, "Philip *findeth* Nathanael:" it so *happened* that the next person Philip should light upon should be Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the town to which our Lord was going; which Nathanael was also prepared, by knowledge of the old Scriptures, and still more by his guileless and simple heart, to believe in Christ, when he should see him.

Thus our Lord, having been without disciples when he was first seen coming to St. John, went into Galilee with four or five at least: who were present at his first miracle, and so seeing his glory, had their faith confirmed in him. And all this was owing, under God, to St. Andrew's taking advantage of the providential *accident* of our Lord's passing by where he was standing with St. John.

Further; in what little beside Holy Scripture tells us of this apostle, we may, if I mistake not, trace something of the same way of thinking and acting. He seems to have been remarkable for what one may call spiritual presence of mind: a disposition to observe and to treasure up, what to others might possibly seem mere casual and insignificant matters, as not knowing what good might be secretly laid up in them, for those who would mark them in the fear of God.

Thus, as in the text St. Andrew was made instrumental in preparing many to be apostles of Christ, so afterward a remark of his led in a manner to the miracle of the loaves, and to the treasure of divine knowledge concerning the bread which came down from heaven, contained in the discourse which followed that miracle. For when our Lord, seeing the multitude, began to try his disciples, saying first to St. Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" and Philip, according to his simplicity, seemed to think it out of the question, St. Andrew, with deeper thought, but not without perplexity, pointed out that they had among them just five loaves and two fishes: "but what," said he, "are

they among so many?" Apparently he had observed enough of our Lord's manner, to feel sure that he did not ask the question without some deep meaning; he rather anticipated some great manifestation of him; but of what particular kind was beyond his conjecture.

So again, when our Lord's time was drawing near, we read of certain Greeks, Greek Jews from a distance, who had come up to the Passover, and who, wishing to see Jesus, made their desire known first to Philip. Philip, as it should seem, doubting whether the matter was of consequence enough to trouble our Lord about it, "cometh and telleth Andrew: and again, Andrew and Philip tell Jesus:" Andrew probably having, as before, the deeper sense of the two, that this and everything else which took place in relation to their divine Master was in the strictest sense providential and mysterious, and must not be allowed to go by as utterly insignificant.

Lastly, whereas we find St. Andrew's name mentioned, among the four who came to our Lord privately, with the question about "the sign of his coming, and the end of the world;" for the four were Peter and James and John and Andrew: this also agrees well with the idea we have been giving of his character. Our Lord had said, as it were incidentally, as he came out of the temple, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down." There was something probably in his manner, which told watchful observant persons, such as St. Andrew, that this was more than a mere passing hint, or remark on the transitory nature of worldly glories. Accordingly he noticed it, and did not permit it to fall to the ground, but following the clew which his gracious Master no doubt offered for that very purpose, he obtained from him, for us and for the whole church, that awful warning, concerning the latter days and the final judgment, which perhaps tells more than any other passage in Scripture, toward keeping up something like the fear of God in a revolting and rebellious world.

Thus we see how much was gained not only for An-

drew himself, and for those persons whom he brought directly to Christ, but also for Christ's kingdom in all ages, and for ourselves among the rest, by this one saint's diligent and dutiful watching of all opportunities and hints for instruction and devotion. He suffered nothing to pass away as in a dream. He was so firmly persuaded that God is in all things, little and great, that he never would put away from his thoughts anything that might be providential, under the pretence that it was too trifling, too remote from religion, to be worth noticing in that point of view.

Why should not you and I learn this holy lesson of him? If not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father, much more may we learn of this great saint to believe that none of his words, or the words of his church, falling on our ears by his providence, were intended to fall in vain. It may be that many of us, when they come to church, cannot even hear a great deal of the holy service: and that even of what they do hear, a great deal is beyond their understanding. But I wish they would consider, that this makes those portions which they do hear, and follow in their minds, so much the more like distinct providential warnings, voices from heaven to them personally. When anything strikes you particularly in a prayer or lesson, more especially if you are deaf or very ignorant, you have reason to think that Almighty God would have you lay hold of that thought, carry it home with you, think on it afterward, see what difference it should make in your conduct, perhaps consult your minister about it. You must give an account of it somehow or other; you cannot be as if it had never entered into your mind.

So much for St. Andrew's Christian presence of mind, as it may be exercised in treasuring up and improving the hints which we receive in this place, especially from the church and the Word of God: next consider whether it may not be also exercised, much to your own and others' profit, in your own intercourse with your brethren. Would that our eyes were more open as St. Andrew's were to the chances which continually occur,



of doing our fellow-creatures, especially our relations and those of the same household, spiritual good! Why are not those, who in some sort have acknowledged our Lord in their hearts, more intent than they generally seem upon first finding their own brothers, their own wives, children, near friends, and bringing them also to Jesus, not in word only, and in mere knowledge, not only by such things as sending them to school (which yet is a plain duty and too much neglected), but much more by watchful care against the first beginnings of sin: by checking heedfully the first oath, the first lewd or profane jest; by anxious watching to see that prayers are said, and lessons learned, and obedience to ministers and teachers practised?

All these, and many more, which true Christian love will find out for herself, are the ways of bringing children, and others committed to our charge, to the knowledge and love of God: to the neglect of which, in good measure, we must attribute this sad result, that in so many families, where the parents seem religious, the children grow up without the fear of God. St. Andrew, you have heard, was on the watch, wherever, and among whomsoever, he was: he availed himself discreetly, not in an affected way, of every opening which God's providence gave him, for bringing first his own brother, and then his friends, and then strangers, to Jesus. It is true Christian wisdom to do as he did: not violently introducing on all occasions the mention of the most sacred things, but never leaving them out of your mind, and gently doing what you can, to make people's attention turn toward them of itself. In this way, a look, a tone of voice, or a single word, used for that purpose humbly and in the fear of God, will often do more good, and less tempt both speaker and hearer to any kind of hypocrisy, than a set and formal discourse would.

To conclude by briefly returning to the point from which I began. If it be so great a part of Christian goodness to catch up the loose hints which the providence of God strews everywhere in our way, we may not think our time lost, if we strive to keep up God's

worship and honor, and to obey him, sanctifying in his church such days as these, though but two or three be then gathered together in his name to meet us there. It rests with ourselves, who do come, to take care that this our good custom (for I will boldly call it so, being as it is, in strict obedience to the prayer book), be not idle and without fruit. It depends on ourselves, seriously to improve the memory of every saint as it occurs, by honoring God for him, and practising his good example ; instead of indulging mere wonder, that so few are found to care for this part of God's service, or mere complaint of the decay of church rules in our days. As we go about our daily tasks, we may see many chances of doing good, each in his own little way, and not a few, wherein we may set on others to do that, which is out of our line or beyond our power. We may quietly notice those occasions, which if we mark them will continually arise, causing us to attend to something in our own conduct, which hitherto, by comparison at least, we have neglected : and thus we may become, not in outward show, but in inward reality, more strict and particular, in other words better and happier, every day that we live in this world. In short, we may make it our rule, never to think anything beneath notice, which is ordered by God's Providence, and for which immortal souls may be the better or the worse : ever remembering that the apostle's rule holds alike for good or evil : " Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

## SERMON XXXI.

## GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT.

1 TIM. vi. 6.

“Godliness, with contentment, is great gain.”

THE apostle St. Paul, having in the course of this his first letter to the bishop of the Ephesian church, given various directions suited to the difficult circumstances in which his “beloved son” (as he calls him), Timothy, was placed, proceeds now, in the latter part of the Epistle, to impress on the bishop, and, through him, on the church generally, some very solemn cautions relative to an evil which, it seems, was then springing up among Christians, and threatening to produce the worst effects.

To understand the force of the apostolic warnings, we must call to mind one or two circumstances relating to the state of society in those times.

Among all the nations of antiquity, not only among the Greeks and Romans, but also with God’s chosen people the Jews, it was, we know, common for persons to have slaves in their houses; whether taken captives in war, or purchased for money, or born in the house. And the condition of these slaves was, of course, very varied, according to the principle or temper of their masters—some being treated as if they were relatives (like the centurion’s servant, “who was dear unto him,” mentioned in the seventh of St. Luke), others again experiencing much harshness, cruelty, and oppression, such as we here of in the accounts of modern slavery.

Now, then, when the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was first preached and made known to the people of these countries—a gospel in which God showed himself

to be "no respecter of persons," but which was offered to all indiscriminately, high and low, rich and poor, bond and free—then trials and difficulties would arise, such as would put very strongly to the test the sincerity of the new converts. We can easily imagine that masters would be very unwilling to acknowledge the spiritual rank (if one may so call it) of their slaves as fully equal to their own—all, in God's sight, miserable offenders, and needing redemption from the slavery of sin. And, on the other hand, there was plainly a danger lest slaves on becoming Christians, and learning that as Christians they were in a spiritual sense and manner, exalted to the same rank with the highest of the sons of men—there was danger, I say, lest, in thus mistaking the meaning of Christian liberty, they should neglect the primary Christian rules of humility and obedience, and so forfeit the blessed privileges placed within their reach.

Accordingly the apostle, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, thus delivers his solemn caution to the bishop, with reference to this subject—a subject which was of course one of touching importance, and affecting the condition of almost or quite every Christian family, or every family in which there were Christians, in the diocese of Ephesus.

"Let as many slaves (says he, ver. 1) as are under the yoke"—that is, as are converted to the gospel, and are become Christians by profession—"let them count their own masters worthy of all honor," even though those masters should be Jews or heathens, having no faith in the sacred name of Jesus Christ; still the Christian slaves must treat them with honor, respect, and obedience, as before; otherwise these masters will wish their slaves had never become Christians, will think that the gospel encourages pride and disobedience—and so (says St. Paul) "the name of God, and the doctrine of the gospel, will be blasphemed," maligned, and evil-spoken of without reason.

This was the advice in the case of Christian slaves having Jewish or heathen masters.

But in the next verse he speaks of a different case, viz. that of Christian slaves having Christian masters. Here the danger to the slave was, that he should become conceited, imagine that his Christianity altered in some way his worldly rank, put all orders of society on a level. No, says St. Paul, nothing of this kind is true—"Those who have believing (that is, Christian) masters, must not despise them," treat them with less respect "because (as Christians) they are brethren; but, quite the contrary, do them service all the rather," in consideration of their blessed Christian unity, of their being "faithful and beloved, and partakers with them of the common benefit"—God's everlasting mercy in Christ Jesus.

"These are the things" (continues the apostle, addressing the bishop), these are the practical truths which I require you to "teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness"—such an one (whatever he may think of himself, or whatever he may profess), such an one is "proud, knowing nothing, but doating about questions and strifes of words."

He then specifies some of the evil results which had followed from these questions and strifes of words, viz. "envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings or suspicions, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that gain is godliness," or, as the original might perhaps be not less faithfully translated, "who suppose that religion is a sort of trade or business"—that is, to make people better off in this world. From such teachers or persons (says the apostle) "withdraw thyself;" that is, be cautious of giving any sanction to such opinions. They will tell you that "gain is godliness," that religion is a good thing if it helps you on in this world, not otherwise—rather I tell you, that "godliness with contentment is great gain;" that a contented life of pure religion, however the world may think meanly of it, "is great gain," will in the end turn out to be the best of all schemes, the most profitable of

all speculations. Everything else will fail, but that will stand any shock or trial.

Such being in some degree the apparent force of the apostle's reasoning in this most remarkable place, let us, under the aid of God's Holy Spirit, endeavor to derive from it some practical hints which may be of service to us under the difficult circumstances in which (surely) we are now placed, whether as individual Christians, or as members of the church called of England.

"Godliness with contentment," says the apostle, is the best business a man can follow, be his station in life what it may.

"Godliness with contentment"—as much as to say, not "Godliness without contentment." There were, it seems, when St. Paul wrote this, and perhaps have been at all times since in the Christian church, persons who, though impressed with a sense of the importance of religion, yet forgot that, in respect of themselves, the proof and trial of it lay in its effect on their hearts and tempers.

A religious discontented person is a sort of contradiction; that is to say, the godliness and holiness of heart which is essential to the true Christian character, cannot consist with a peevish and discontented temper, any more than with habitual impurity or dishonesty.

This is a rule of much importance to be attended to. For, in some shape or other, the temptation to be discontented with our lot assails most persons, at least occasionally, and at some period of their lives. And some are almost always murmuring and complaining.

Now we ought to remember, when we are thus unhappily inclined, the apostle's rule of "Godliness with contentment." We ought not to flatter ourselves, that because we are in a certain sense, and in some respects, *religious*, and, as we think, "godly;" I say we ought not to be so certain that therefore we have those tempers and dispositions which imply what the apostle calls "the power of godliness," as distinct from "the form" of it.

Especially, it greatly concerns us to ascertain whether what we call our religion, is of sufficient strength to

keep us contented with our lot and station, be it what it may; to restrain us from all murmuring and repining thoughts; from all feelings of envy, or grudging against others, who (we think) deserve less, but have more than ourselves; in one word, whether in the most emphatic and admirable words of the catechism, we really do endeavor, without comparing our own condition to that of others, "to do our own duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call us."

Unless this be our frame of mind and course of practice, we cannot properly be said to possess "Godliness with contentment." And then whether "Godliness without contentment" (if such a thing were possible) can be in the sight of God of any price, all persons can judge who with seriousness and humility call to mind what are the duties and the privileges of a Christian.

Again, it seems a point worth some consideration, that there may be and are such things as *ungodliness with contentment*, and *ungodliness too with discontentment*. As to the latter of these, the disposition to lead a miserable life, without present comfort or future hope, however strange and unaccountable it may seem; surely instances of such conduct are not, alas! very uncommon among us. And the great distress and perplexity which, from whatever cause, has befallen the trade and manufactures in many parts of this country, has a natural tendency to increase this unhappy state of what may be called (as I said) "*ungodliness with discontentment*." I suppose I may say that there are many persons who do not go to any place of worship (as the phrase is) for weeks and months, I may almost say for years, because their clothes are not good enough; or in some cases, absolutely from the want of them—such want being partly owing to their own negligence. This by degrees brings the mind into a state of what may be termed *ungodliness*, or *irreligion*; that is, people get gradually into a notion, and at last into a confirmed opinion that they can get on as well without religion as with it. Then, they have no support left against the troubles and difficulties which surround them; feeling

that they have in a manner cast off the worship of God, they also feel that God has as it were cast off them; and so they seem to lose all hope, all resolution, all energy and spirit: dissatisfied with others, no less than with themselves, they drag on a miserable life—a life unworthy of virtuous heathens, much less of baptized Christians. Such is ungodliness with discontentment: whether there is danger of its increasing in this our once favored country, let persons of observation decide. At all events such cases, when they do occur, should be a warning to us, into what a low and desperate, indolent, discontented wretchedness we may be permitted to fall, if we once habitually cast off the love and service of our heavenly Father.

However, there is perhaps a disposition still worse, and, if possible, more fatal than this; viz. (as I before said) “*ungodliness with contentment,*” when persons in a Christian country go on from year to year, setting at naught all the holy rules of Christ’s religion—yet all the while cheerful and self-satisfied, maintaining a decent character in the world—living without fear—dying without hope. This, I say, may be called “*ungodliness with contentment;*” and is, I suppose, also likely to increase very rapidly in this kingdom, now that the restraints of religion, that is, of the church, are in all ways sought to be got rid of under the sanction, as it may seem, of law, and of the highest authorities: as if the world would go on all the better, and liberty flourish, in proportion as God and his laws could be set aside and forgotten.

Nevertheless, as I observed, however bad a thing “*ungodliness with discontentment*” may be—*ungodliness with contentment* seems to be worse, I mean more fatal to men’s spiritual interests. When men are wicked and miserable, there is hope that their misery may lead them to reflection, and so to repentance and amendment. But when they are irreligious and unprincipled, yet all the while easy, cheerful, and self-satisfied, there is then *indeed* reason to fear that they have provoked God to give them over to their own imaginations—that they



are fast sinking into complete "hardness of heart, and contempt of his word and commandment." And what the end of such a course must be, none but an infidel can deny or doubt.

There remains then no other alternative to us, if we would be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, not in name and profession only, but in deed and in truth; our rule of heart and life must be "godliness with contentment;" this is the one rule of life for us all as Christians, without regard to differences of rank or station.

There must not be contentment without godliness—nor godliness without contentment (if such were possible); but both must be together, or else the heart will not be right in the sight of God. This, perhaps, it is not difficult to see and agree to—but to bring it consistently into practice, in this country at this time, is perhaps more difficult than might be readily supposed.

The word translated "godliness," means, in the original, what we should call religion, that is, a religious plan or system of worship. Now in the primitive church, as all persons know who have turned their attention to ancient Ecclesiastical history, there was one uniform system and no other. But now there are so many varieties, and shades of varieties, without number, and yet continually increasing, that among so many there is a great likelihood that vast numbers of persons will settle down into nothing—especially, as the advocates of the church are set down at once for bigots—and bigotry is reckoned so bad a crime. However, as you have been often told, so it must be again and again repeated, that if it is bigotry to stand steady to the truth, and not to shift and change about with every wind of doctrine—if bigotry and steady love of truth are the same thing, at least sometimes; in that sense surely we have no need to be ashamed of the name of "bigots;" but rather to wish that we were more deserving of the name than we are—the best of us.

However, I mention this to show how many difficulties stand in the Christian's way in respect of his fulfilling the apostle's rule of godliness with contentment.

If the Christian world (as it is called), were what it ought to be, "of one heart and of one soul," it would be sufficiently difficult to act up to this rule, owing to the weakness and corruption of our fallen nature; but now from external causes this difficulty is sadly increased.

Yet difficulty is one thing, and impossibility another. By the all-powerful grace of God duly sought in prayer and sacramental ordinances, more especially in the communion feast of the body and blood of the Son of God, we may be enabled to prevail in this necessary conflict, this conflict for life or death. I say, a necessary conflict. For, surely, to hope for salvation through Jesus Christ, without a religious and godly life, is as great a delusion as to trust to the rules of Mahometanism or heathenism; that is, the Mahometan or the heathen may have as reasonable hopes as the wilfully irreligious Christian.

And thus, as there are many present difficulties in the path of sincere godliness, so also in the exercise of contentment.

Whatever the causes may be, no one can doubt that in many instances it is extremely difficult indeed, and more so than it used formerly to be in this country, for a person to obtain a competent maintenance for himself and his family; especially in the manufacturing districts we know this to be the case, too well. Yet, to persons so suffering, the divine rule is offered now, as much as when, some years since, they or their fathers were in more prosperous circumstances. "Godliness with contentment is great gain." "Contentment," that is, a patient reliance on God's disposals, looking for better things when it shall please him, and checking all murmuring and repining thoughts.

This is a plain rule to give, but doubtless very difficult to act up to in times of severe trial, and when distress comes on a family in many ways (as one may say) at once. Poverty, sickness, nakedness, discredit, low-spirits—all these things form together a trial of greater severity (I suppose) than any one can imagine who does not feel it. And to tell such an one that he ought to be patient and contented—it is very true—so we all

ought to be ; nevertheless, the means of being so, ought to be pointed also ; implied in the apostle's emphatic word, when he says, not "contentment" only, but godliness *with* contentment is great gain ; or, according to the force of the original words, a great bargain—a profitable line of business.

As if he had said, if you wish to engage in an undertaking which is quite sure to be successful, take up this, "Godliness with contentment." All other plans, however carefully concerted, may fail, and often do—this never can ; this will always be a profitable business, and will end in "great gain."

What that gain is, we cannot doubt, though its greatness and value be beyond our powers of computation.

Nor in the competition for it, is there any middle place : if we gain it, we gain all ; if we lose it, we lose all.

In conclusion, let me only offer two or three brief admonitions, such as the subject must naturally suggest to persons of "humble, penitent, and obedient hearts," in times of trial and perplexity.

St. Paul, you see, directed by the Holy Spirit, sets forth "godliness with contentment," as the *capital* (if I may so say) or stock on which the Christian must carry on his business, his "trading" (as it were) for eternity ; for that is implied in the original word.

Be sure, then, in the first place, to have a foundation well laid in godliness, piety, religion pure and undefiled. Be not ashamed of your God and Savior ; that is, be not ashamed to follow those holy rules by which his saints of all ages have been willing to be guided. A meek and quiet spirit, obedience to the authority of Christ's ancient church, a patient enduring of scorn and contempt from all, but especially from those who think themselves more spiritual or more enlightened ; pray to be led in the good and the right way, and not to be left to the false lights of popular opinion or of private feeling ; a sincere distrust of our own frailty and weakness, heartfelt sorrow for past negligences, and earnest supplica-

tions to be enabled to amend wherever we have done amiss ; and to all this, if there be added a humble, regular, obedient attendance on those gracious means of spiritual improvement, which have been vouchsafed to the church of God through many trials and perplexities, down to this day ; if you thus endeavor to serve your God and Father from day to day, and from week to week, you need not doubt that so far at least you have made progress in the fulfilment of the sacred rule of "godliness with contentment."

But we must, as I before said, be very careful in this as in other cases ; be careful, I say, not to separate what God hath joined together ; we must not be satisfied with a form of godliness without real contentment, nor with a show of contentment without godliness.

Remember, then, that as we none of us can choose our stations nor our places, so we all have very difficult duties to perform in them. To live an easy, undisturbed life, is out of the question. I mean it is out of the question for any one who would faithfully do his duty to his God and Savior.

Hence the necessity of contentment ; not that we may grow indolent and slothful, but the very contrary ; that we may take things as they are, and do our own duty under them ; never expecting that the world will grow better, or our difficulties less, but earnestly hoping that *we* may grow better, and more worthy of the great name by which we are called.

Then only can we truly lead a godly and contented life, free from the slavery of the world, and of our own evil passions, walking always in the love and fear of God, and having resigned our wills to his.

It is unquestionably in this frame of mind that true devotion consists ; and if we are not habitually praying and endeavoring in this way to regulate our affections before our omniscient Judge and Savior, we may indeed have religion enough to satisfy the world or our own feelings, to pass respectably through life, and to meet death with decency and calmness—but what will all this avail, if God shall try us by a different rule, even

by his most strict and sacred precepts delivered to us in his gospel ?

And yet certain it is—and unless we are infidels we cannot deny or doubt it—that by this rule we shall be judged, according to his own most awful warning :—

If any man (said he) hear my words, and obey them not,  
I judge him not.

that is, not now, in this present life of trial ; nevertheless he shall not escape—for

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words,  
Hath one that judgeth him.  
The word that I have spoken—  
The same shall judge him in the last day.

## SERMON XXXII.

## CHRISTIAN PREPARATION.

AMOS iv. 12.

“Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!”

THESE few but solemn words form part of an address delivered by divine authority to the Jews, under the following circumstances.

The kingdom having been, after the death of Solomon, divided into two parts (as all persons know who turn their attention to Scripture history), and thenceforth becoming two separate states, the one called the kingdom of Israel, and the other, that of Judah; the kings of Israel were, with few (if any) exceptions, given to idolatry, and in other respects too like their founder, the usurper Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.

Nevertheless, some of them were powerful and successful monarchs, among whom may particularly be mentioned Jeroboam the Second, who, in his wars with the Syrians, prevailed against them, and recovered Damascus and other ancient long-lost possessions of the Israelites. With this success, no doubt, he and his subjects were much elated; but it does not appear that they were at all the more inclined to seek Jehovah, the God of their fathers, or to acknowledge their own past sinfulness with true penitence and resolutions of amendment.

At this time, to warn them of their danger, and of the ruin that awaited them without timely repentance, God sent to them two of his messengers the prophets, if so be they would listen, before it should be too late, to the voice of mercy.

These two prophets were Hosea and Amos.

The writings of these holy men have been preserved to us, and they contain abundant and awful proof of the

dreadful corruptions into which the Israelites of that time had fallen ; proof, also, no less decisive and awful (if any were wanting), of the dreadful indignation of God against those who despise his warnings, his goodness, his forbearance and long-suffering.

With respect to the prophet Amos, it appears that he was specially called out of the land of Judah to prophesy to Israel, and that he fulfilled his commission with the most heroic courage, delivering his warnings at Bethel itself, the chief place of Israelitish idolatry (as we find in the seventh chapter).

He, indeed (as was the case with most of the prophets), was commissioned to utter the divine counsels, not merely as they respected his own nation of the Jews, but other nations also, the inhabitants of the neighboring countries and cities.

Yet though his warnings (see the first and second chapters) are severe toward Damascus, Gaza, Tyrus, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and even Judah, it is against Israel that his most indignant threatenings are denounced, for their forgetfulness of their God, and their oppression of one another.

And then, in this fourth chapter, he proceeds to mention the different judgments which, one after another, God had sent on them ; famine and want of bread, then want of rain and water, then blasting and mildew, pestilence and war. And then he refers to some awful destruction by fire from heaven, or perhaps lightning, the particulars of which have not been recorded. But something of the kind seems to be certainly implied in these words : "I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning : yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

And then, since all had been in vain, and not even these awful judgments could move their stony hearts, he seems to say, that nothing more could be done, their destruction as a nation was unavoidable.

"Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel !"  
 [And] because I will do this unto thee,  
 Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel !"

That is, prepare thyself, if penitent, to meet him with supplications, prayers, and tears; but if still hardened and impenitent, to encounter his just vengeance and fiery indignation. But at all events, whether penitent or impenitent, grieved or hardened, "prepare, O Israel, to meet thy God;" still *thy* God, though thou hast disowned him.

Now, whatever might be the condition and conduct of those Israelites, it cannot, I suppose, be imagined by any person of the least consideration, that such a warning as this is less applicable or less necessary for us than it was for them. For, like them, we have received warnings and notices in abundance of what we are to expect; like them, too, alas! we have, for the most part, disregarded those warnings, and gone every one his own way.

However, meet our God we must, prepared or unprepared; and surely it were far better to meet him now with sorrow, shame, and sincere endeavors after amendment, than to meet him hereafter in the day of his wrath, and when the door of mercy shall be for ever closed.

As Christians, then, immortal spirits redeemed by the blood of Jesus the Son of God, placed here for a little space on our passage and trial for eternity, *preparation* is our business—and our only business: preparation, that is, for the great changes which are drawing on upon us, and of which we must all soon be witnesses; but whether in joy or in sorrow, in hope or in despair, it is left to ourselves to determine.

Now religious preparation implies in it, at least these three things: First, serious forethought; Second, actual search and inquiry; Third, a resolute course of practice suitable to what appears to be the truth of our condition with respect to the future.

Without these, it is vain to flatter ourselves that we are "preparing to meet our God."

Serious forethought and anxiety about what end we are coming to, the reasonableness or rather the necessity of this, is what no thoughtful person can deny or question.



For as the great distinguishing mark which at present separates us from the beasts that perish, is the power of exercising reason and reflection, so is this power in nothing more wonderfully shown than in our being capable of looking forward, and ascertaining with a considerable degree of certainty, what will be the consequences of our conduct, both on this side the grave and beyond it.

The mind, indeed, when left to itself, naturally stretches its views onward; but the prospect being very often alarming, or at least doubtful and perplexing, the generality of people do not like to dwell on it. And this is one great reason why people according to their different dispositions, get into the opposite habits of covetousness or extravagance.

One is all for business and money-getting, another, all for pleasure and enjoyment; the course of conduct is as different as may be, but the principle is much the same—a strong aversion and dislike to look seriously forward to our condition in the eternal world.

If any proof were wanting of the extreme, and, I may say, fearful corruption of our nature, this alone would be but too decisive.

Nevertheless, however great and pitiable our frailty may be, the path of duty in this, as in other respects, is plainly marked out for us, and if we wilfully desert that path, we must be left without excuse.

I am not now saying that in all particulars of everyday conduct it is easy to say positively how one ought to act, but as a general rule, it may be asserted, that if a person does not live in constant forethought and anxiety about his eternal state, he must somehow or other be going wrong.

And this forethought and anxiety, if it be sincere, and at all proportionate to the importance of the subject, will lead us to search also, and inquire what our prospects really are, what promises and threatenings are before us to be fulfilled in eternity, and in what degree our conduct at present may produce effects to be felt, for good or evil, hereafter, for ever.

It seems, I say, requisite, that we make this search

and inquiry not merely with reference to mankind in general, but to ourselves, each of us. For, after all, it is only so far as we consider religion a personal thing, a matter which infinitely concerns our own selves, each one of us, that we can make a due estimate of its vast, unspeakable value.

For this reason it is quite necessary that time should be spent, and attention bestowed, in closely examining what may be called the accounts of our souls.

No day or season indeed can be unfit for this holy and absolutely indispensable work. Yet is it peculiarly fitting for our employment on that sacred day, which even the tyrannical world allows us to consecrate every week to the memory of our Lord's resurrection. At other sacred seasons too, such as Advent in preparation for Christmas, and Lent in preparation for Easter, and in our more solemn occasional examination of ourselves before receiving the sacrament of the Lord's supper; at such times especially, it is necessary for us to take particular account of the state of our souls, and to ascertain what hopes we are really authorized to cherish, of our being at present in favor with our God, and our coming at last to his eternal joy.

Yet now, from different causes, so many taking for granted that they are right, and so many like Gallio "caring for none of these things"—inquires of this kind really employ very little of people's time and attention.

And even of those who are more sincerely and seriously disposed, too many have suffered their minds to be perplexed with difficult unedifying questions, and even have come to imagine, that perhaps, after all, men will not be rewarded or punished according to their works, but by some other rule laid up in the secret counsels of the Almighty.

The natural consequence of this is (just what the great enemy intends when he lays the snare), that so many who make a good beginning in the ways of religion and holiness, afterward become either over-confident, or else cold and indifferent; but in either case are moved away (as St. Paul says) from the simplicity which is in Christ—and so too, often instead of adorn-

ing, they disgrace the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

Being then in such danger of falling, it is the more needful that we should watch ourselves very narrowly, and with the utmost suspicion. For it is only by this constant, close attention that we can obtain that knowledge of ourselves, and of our spiritual condition which is necessary for us, if we would indeed be prepared to meet our God.

But for this blessed purpose, we must not only use ourselves to serious forethought, and actual search and inquiry, but also we must resolutely maintain a course of practice suitable to the prospect which is before us.

We are well aware that at no great distance of time, and even that completely uncertain, we must have done with everything here ; and the place where we are (as the beautiful psalm says), shall know us no more.

This we are perfectly well aware of ; whether the consideration affects our conduct in any way, is another question.

We are also assured that at some future day, which how near it may be, or how far off, is purposely kept a secret from us ; we each of us in our own persons shall be summoned before God's judgment-seat, to give account for our own works, of the deeds done in the body, that is, of the way in which we have passed this our life of mortality.

We are farther assured, that the Judge before whose tribunal we shall then appear, will be one whose name we have often heard, often repeated, either in reference, or in thoughtlessness, or blasphemy ; who having before shown his infinite love by coming to die for us, will then show his justice, power, and majesty also infinite, when he comes to be our Judge.

We are also warned, not by Scripture only, but by every day's experience of the conduct of those who are called Christians, and who have been baptized into the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ—we are abundantly warned, I say, that it is now in our power, in any way and any degree, to scorn, neglect, and disregard the declared will of our Redeemer. This is plain and

unquestionable. For many things which he has most expressly and repeatedly forbidden, are openly and avowedly practised among all orders and degrees of Christians. And that heavenly disposition which he most solemnly enjoins on all his disciples, as what he expects of them—a disposition made up of purity, meekness, love, and deadness to this world's things—to say that this is the prevailing disposition among Christians, even among such as are more seriously disposed, would argue, either a great ignorance of the way in which people are going on, or, what is worse, a dangerous and mistaken estimate of that perfection evangelical, to which our profession obliges us to aspire.

Yet, whatever lives we choose to lead, however careless, or even profligate, however neglectful of God, and forgetful of eternity, still we do know, and we must know, that we shall not escape at last, we must be called to account, we must meet our God. Nor is there any way of preparing ourselves for that awful hour, but by keeping it in mind from day to day, and ever living with a view to it.

As the blood of Christ Jesus is all our hope and dependance, so his will must be all our rule and guidance.

And take we good heed, lest while we profess faith in his blood, we forget or neglect his will.

We cannot suppose, if we turn our thoughts to the subject with any seriousness, that in the day of his terror he will receive us as good and faithful servants, if we have not made it the business of our lives to *be* good and faithful—that is, always, and in all circumstances, to endeavor to act in such a way as we think will be most likely to please him. This, and nothing else but this, is the duty of a good and faithful servant; and if this is not actually and really our course of life, we are not preparing ourselves to meet our God.

But now, I ask, can we have any reasonable hope or comfort in our hearts, if we are leading an unprepared life? Do we consider what this is, and what it will end in? To say that we are no worse than other people, or that we have done many right things, or that we feel

satisfied in our consciences, and are not afraid to die ; all this is nothing—nothing to trust to or depend on ; and we must be well aware that it is so. I mean that there is nothing solid in such foundations as these, on which to build our hopes of eternity.

Or if we say that we are not yet quite prepared to meet our God, but we mean to be before he calls for us—what, has he not called for us already ? has he not given us, every one of us, daily, hourly warnings ? And do we expect that he will work miracles to convert us, that he will force us to heaven whether we will or no ? Where is there any encouragement given in Scripture to any such imagination as this ? And if the gospel of mercy does not encourage us in cherishing it, what else are we trusting to ?

It is thought a sad thing for Christians to be cut off unexpectedly, to be called unprepared to meet their God—and no doubt it is a sad and a fearful thought.

But surely it is also no less fearful, for us to venture to *live* unprepared ; to lead any kind of life but one of thorough, unreserved devotion—any kind of life, in short, unworthy of angels and immortal spirits, sojourning here indeed for a little while on earth, but speedily to be called away to the presence of their Father in heaven.

This is true and unquestionable ; and what it concerns us all equally, and not one more than another, to keep deeply impressed on our hearts ; and may Almighty God of his infinite mercy enable us so to do, more than we have ever yet done, the best of us. For “when once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us—and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are,—then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you I know you not whence ye are. Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.

“Take ye heed, then, watch and pray ; for ye know not when the time is.”

## SERMON XXXIII.

## THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH.

ACTS II. 42, 43.

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul.”

ALTHOUGH Almighty God has in his just judgment permitted his church, once “glorious, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,” to be as it were cast down to the earth, and defiled in the dust—though to her may be too truly applied what the prophet Jeremiah spake of the Jewish church in her affliction: “Her adversaries are the chief: her enemies prosper; for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions—and from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed;” though such, I say, be alas! the condition of Christ’s visible church among us, at least to a rightly discerning eye, yet, blessed be God’s holy name for it, we are not yet so far quite cast off, but that there still remains some ground, however faint, for consolation and hope. Whereon this our hope may be founded, is plainly a subject well worthy the consideration of thoughtful churchmen; and, as such, I shall now briefly request your attention to this one inquiry, whether it be not in our power to believe and to live as the first Christians did? because if this be in our power, it is evident that the door of hope and comfort is not yet closed against us, nor is it impossible but that living and dying according to the pattern of our forefathers in the Christian faith, the members of the primitive church, we may trust, as they did, being partakers of Christ’s sufferings here, to be allowed in the day when he shall be revealed, to be like them “glad also, with exceeding joy.”

Of the Jews who were assembled at Jerusalem from all parts of the world, to keep the feast of Pentecost, about seven weeks after the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, a very considerable number were so wrought upon—first by the great miracle of the languages, and then by the reasoning of the apostles—that they could not but profess themselves ready to follow at once the guidance of men whom they were constrained to acknowledge as no other than the messengers and ambassadors of the Most High. “Men and brethren,” said they, “what shall we do?” To which their earnest question the apostle’s answer was as decisive as it was encouraging. “Repent,” said he, “and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For (added he) the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call,” without distinction of Jew or Gentile. And then the apostle continued his admonitions to them at considerable length, “saying, save yourselves from this untoward generation;” that is, he urged on them in a practical way, and with words of warning and caution, the danger they were in, either if they should refuse to embrace the Christian profession so offered to them, or if embracing it, they should afterward settle down into an unholy or careless course of life.

They, however, the history says, “gladly receiving his word,” readily submitting themselves to the obligations of the Christian covenant, were admitted to be “baptized the same day, to the number of about three thousand souls.” And at first, at least, whatever might have been the case afterward with some of them, theirs was not a mere external lukewarm profession, they really endeavored to live accordingly—“they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer. And fear came (or was) upon every soul.”

Under these five heads there seems to be set forth to us in a general view, the religious course of life and practice entered on by the first Christians; those who

were members of the church within a twelvemonth after the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus.

If we can follow their example, surely we cannot be very wrong; if we neglect it, we cannot be very right. And this, I say, is a point highly deserving the consideration of all serious minds, of all who are in earnest about their salvation, of all who do not wish merely to feel safe, but to be so. And, alas! how few are these all.

You will observe that in the primitive church, religion was the chief thing on people's minds; they applied themselves in earnest to it, or as our translation well expresses it, "continued steadfast"—

1st. In the apostles' doctrine;

2dly. In the apostles' fellowship;

3dly. In the breaking of the bread;

4thly. In the prayers;

and all this because

5thly. Fear (that is, awe and reverence, and a deep sense of the truth of the gospel) was on every soul.

First, It is said, "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."

The word "doctrine" means, in the original, "teaching," or "instruction;" and in that sense merely is, apparently, sometimes to be understood in the New Testament, as for example, when it is said "the people were astonished at our Lord's doctrine," that is, at the authority and dignity with which he delivered his instructions, for so it is explained: "He taught them as one that had authority [of his own] and not as the Scribes" [mere expounders]. And St. Paul warning Bishop Timothy of the corruptions into which professing Christians should fall, admonished him to stand firm nevertheless, not to fail either in zeal or in patience: "Reprove," said he, "rebuke, exhort with all *long-suffering and doctrine*;" that is, with unwearied teaching and instruction: and other places might be mentioned not unlike.



Nevertheless, I suppose, the word "doctrine" has oftentimes a more confined and particular meaning, with reference, that is, to the great special concerning truths offered to the hearts (I say the hearts, rather than the minds) of true believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Thus, for example (Acts xiii.), it is said of the Roman officer, Sergius Paulus, that he was "astonished at *the doctrine* of the Lord;" that is, at the statement of Christian truth set forth by the apostles, and confirmed by miracle. Again, St. Paul, in the first chapter of his epistle to Titus, describing the qualifications of a Presbyter, says, he should be one who can maintain (or stand up for) the faithful word or argument "*according to the doctrine*;" for so it is originally, though translated "as he hath been taught." In the short second epistle of St. John, *the doctrine* of Christ is three times mentioned, as above all things to be maintained by all who would lay claim to the name of Christian. To which may be added, that St. Paul congratulates the Christians in the city of Rome, that they had proved the sincerity of their conversion by their course of life—"for," says he, "ye have obeyed from the heart that *form of doctrine* which was delivered you;" referring their thoughts as it may seem to the profession of Christian truth made in their baptism—in fact, what we term the creed, and what St. Paul calls "a form of doctrine," a type, or model, or rule of Christian truth.

From these and other passages which might be alleged, we may conclude that when it is said of the first Christians, that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine," we are to understand that they resolutely assented, both with their hearts and their lips, to those great fundamental principles of the gospel which the apostles set before them—and this, notwithstanding every difficulty, whether from within or without—their own prejudices or the scorn or persecution of the world—from whatever quarter the opposition might be offered, "they continued steadfast."

We observe, in the next place, what the sacred his-

torian asserts of the members of this primitive church, that they "continued steadfastly also in the fellowship (or communion) of the apostles," as well as in their doctrine.

This word, sometimes translated "fellowship," and sometimes "communion," seems to imply intimate union and sympathy, as of the members of the body one with another, so of all with the Head.

It is sometimes used to express the great mystery of God's condescending love, in uniting his church to himself by the mediation of his Son, and the sanctification of his Spirit; and sometimes it expresses the union of true believers in the visible church, each in their several stations, held together by the bonds of obedience and love, and avoiding all schisms and divisions as contrary to the doctrine which they had received.

This spirit of love and unity the first Christians most carefully cherished—thus they continued steadfastly in the apostles' fellowship and communion—and as long as they did so continue, the divine blessing was on them; but when some began to break the bonds of this unity, and to fall away into sects and divisions, we read in the letters of the apostles, how highly displeasing this their conduct was to the great invisible Head of the church.

We are told, thirdly, of this church of the first Christians, that they continued steadfastly in breaking of bread, or as it is originally, "*the breaking of the bread*;" that must mean of course the celebration of the holy feast of their Lord's body and blood, in the manner in which he himself appointed, when he said to his apostles, "Take, eat, this is my body;" "Do this in remembrance of me."

That this is the meaning of the expression, "breaking of bread," we cannot doubt, both because such particular mention is made by all the sacred historians, of our Lord's breaking the bread at the institution of the holy Eucharist; and also because we are told repeatedly, that the apostles, as part of their public devotional duties, did break bread with the other Christians; and farther, because St. Paul expressly says, "the bread which we

(the apostles) break, is the communion of the body of Christ."

We see, then, that the Christians, in the earliest and therefore the purest days of Christianity, continued steadfastly in breaking of bread; notwithstanding every difficulty and objection, whether from the violence or scorn of foes without, or the treachery of their own hearts within, would on no account neglect the command of their dying Lord; as knowing that unless they were united to him, they could be none of his; and that of this union there were no means open to them, except such as he had appointed and blessed.

Moreover, these good and holy men, the members of the primitive church, who continued so resolutely and consistently in the doctrine and fellowship of the apostles, and in the commemoration of their Redeemer's death, at his own holy table—were steadfast also in prayers—or, as it is originally, in *the* prayers; from which, as from other grounds, we may justly infer, that even then, in the very beginning of the gospel, set rules and forms of prayer were provided, and sanctioned by apostolical authority for the use of the church. And that these rules were religiously and carefully regarded, we cannot doubt when we reflect that those first Christians were fresh, as it were, and earnest in the profession of the gospel, with the apostles for their guides and instructors, and taught by them that "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace in all churches of the saints."

If now it be asked, why the members of the primitive church yielded up their prejudices and inclinations in so many ways as they must have done, before they could consent to such a course of religious discipline as that implied in these words—to continue steadfast and regular in their regard to the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers—the statement next following must be considered as supplying the grounds and principles of their conduct—"fear was upon every soul."

They were thoroughly in earnest in their religion.

They had such a deep and unaffected sense of the transitoriness of all worldly things, of the necessity of having God for their friend, of their own frailty, sin, and unworthiness, of the holiness, truth, and Almighty power of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the blessedness of being true members of his church ; an awful sense of these things so filled their souls, that all other things seemed of small consequence, and worth no more of their care and anxiety. In a life of true devotion and practical holiness, was all their consolation, all their hope.

And may we not, too, my brethren, we whose lot is cast in this late period of the militant church ; may we not still, after eighteen centuries, derive hope and consolation from the same thoughts, and the same practices, which the primitive Christians took refuge in ?

Is it not in our power also to continue steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers ?

That these high privileges are within our reach, is unquestionable, the doubt is, alas ! whether we know or reflect on the value of our treasure.

We possess the apostle's doctrine, in the blessed volume of Scripture ; to our possession of which may be truly applied the emphatic words of our Lord and Master : "Blessed are the eyes that see the things which ye see, and read the things which ye read : for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to hear and read the thing which ye can hear or read from that book, and have not known them." We possess also the apostle's doctrine in the church prayer book, not only because we have preserved there "the form of doctrine," the apostles', and other ancient creeds ; but also, because much of the noble and magnificent liturgy is as ancient and venerable as it is noble ; and if not in form, yet in spirit and meaning, may be dated even as high as the apostolic age.

And as we have by God's blessing the apostle's doctrine, so also the apostles' fellowship. Our bishops derive all their spiritual authority by succession from the

apostles downward—we, the inferior clergy, all ours from the bishops. If this be denied us, nothing remains on which we can ground any claim for respect or regard. If this be denied us, we are nothing better than usurpers, self-appointed ministers, useful perhaps for the peace and order of society, but spiritually powerless.

But, blessed be God, this cannot be denied us with truth, we still have, though unworthy, the apostles' fellowship as well as doctrine; and while these are left to us, our hope and consolation cannot at least be altogether lost.

We have, too, still in all its vital efficacy to faithful souls, the holy sacrament of the eucharist, the breaking of the bread, the communion of the body and blood of Christ, set within reach of all who are religiously and devoutly disposed to follow their Savior's rules, and who desire to be spiritually united to him, as knowing that, except in that union, we have not any well-grounded hope of life and immortality.

And as we of this church possess the blessed privilege of partaking spiritually of that body which was broken for us, and for our sins, so also have we prayers, even *the* prayers, sanctioned by the ancient church, one may say, even from the apostolic times, and such as, when uttered by humble lips and from a pure heart, cannot but be acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Being thus *able* at least to continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers; still the touching question remains, has "fear come upon every soul?" Are we indeed deeply impressed with the *reality*, the substantial, overwhelming importance of all these things, and of our laying them to heart, now while it is yet an accepted time with us, a day of salvation.

If this be indeed the case with us, and our conscience can bear us witness that we are indeed in *earnest*, then may we encourage feelings of hope and consolation.

But if otherwise, if we are not living, or trying to live, as the first Christians did, then we have reason to

fear that somehow we are deceiving ourselves with false confidences, and that we shall be found in the great day to be in the condition of that servant "who knew his Lord's will, but prepared not himself, nor did according to his will." From so sad a delusion may God in his mercy preserve us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## SERMON XXXIV.

## THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

## 1 CORINTHIANS IV. 1.

“Let a man so account of us—as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

THIS account which St. Paul gives of his own office as an apostle, is applied by the church, and, we may be sure, not without good reason, to the whole Christian ministry.

The subject is one in every way of great importance, and, like all other subjects relating to religion, it is one about which people are very content to remain in ignorance or error. We are too apt to be in earnest about anything, rather than about religion.

There seem to be two reasons why, at this season particularly,\* our thoughts are directed to the Christian ministry. Thus, in the collect we pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, that as at his first coming he sent his messenger, that is, John the Baptist, to prepare his way before him—so now the ministers and stewards of his mysteries, may duly prepare the way for his second coming.

In the epistle, we have St. Paul's account of the character and office of Christ's ministers.

In the gospel, we have the character and office of St. John the Baptist, set forth to us in the very words of our Lord himself.

There seem, then, I say, to be two reasons why this subject is offered to our thoughts particularly at this time: the one, because it is a subject especially suitable

\* Third Sunday in Advent.

for this season of Advent ; the other, because *this* week is what is called by the church “an Ember-week.”

With regard to the first of these reasons—the subject is especially suitable for this Advent season, because it seems to have direct reference to the last Advent of Christ ; his coming to judge the world.

For as John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for his first coming by preaching of repentance, so is it the proper and only business of clergymen, to prepare the way for his second coming, by laboring to “turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.”

Also, it is to be observed, that this week is what is called by the church “an Ember-week.” For there are, you know, four Sundays in the year appointed for the solemn ordination of deacons and priests, of which the Sunday before Christmas is always one. And some days in the week before, were specially employed by good men in prayer, and fasting, and intercession to Almighty God, because they considered of what infinite importance it was, that none but persons of sound piety and judgment, should be admitted into the Christian ministry.

And this is the other reason, why on this day our thoughts should be particularly directed to such a subject as they are, in the collects, epistle, and gospel.

Such an occasion, then, being offered us, we can scarcely do better than consider a little what is really the proper nature and meaning of the Christian ministry—so far, at least, as it concerns our own practice.

Now to understand this, or any other matter of the same sort, we must call to mind what our own circumstances really are : that we are placed here to prepare ourselves for eternity ; that we have but a short time allowed us for this preparation ; that we are in a dangerous world ; that of ourselves we are deplorably weak, and ready to yield to all evil.

A serious consideration of these plain truths seems necessary, before we can rightly apprehend the importance of St. Paul’s admonition in the text.

We are then, all of us, on our trial for eternity ; that



is, on our behavior now it depends what our condition shall be, happy or miserable in the eternal world.

We cannot understand *how* this should be, that happiness or misery should depend on a person's being good or bad.

But that it *is* so, we see plainly very often in this world. And that it *shall be* so hereafter, we are assured over and over again in the Holy Scriptures; indeed, it is always supposed throughout the gospel revelation, that we are to be judged according to our works.

But then, although we are thus on our trial for eternity, and what we *shall be* in the next life depends on what we *are* in this, yet is it certain that we have but a short and precarious time, wherein to prepare ourselves for our day of doom.

This is plain in whatever way we consider the matter; and though people may deny all religion, yet they cannot deny this.

No one can say that he shall live a long time, or any time certain. And when we talk of a long life, it is only long by comparison.

Even with respect to the business of this world, this life is reckoned short; and many people die, and leave their plans and schemes unfinished. But with respect to religion, and the preparation for such an account as we shall have to give, it is plain that our longest time here must be exceedingly brief and transitory.

It is moreover to be observed, that the world in which we live, is so far from giving us assistance, in these our dangerous circumstances, that it is, in fact, itself one of our greatest enemies.

If we are placed here on our trial for an eternal sentence, the world by its precept and example, urges us to disregard these serious considerations, and to live and die at all hazards, without regard to the future.

If our time of probation too, is really but short and transitory, then the world, like a false friend, persuades us to make the *wrong* use of this consideration. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." A doctrine this, directly at variance with all sound reason and

religion, which ever admonish us to "remember the end;" to "spend the time of our sojourning here in fear;" to "watch, as those who know not at what hour their Lord may come."

A sort of life this quite suitable to *our* condition and circumstances, but such as the world is ever ready to ridicule and despise.

Added to all this, we ourselves are at the best but weak and helpless, easily yielding to the various temptations which beset us.

We, who are on our trial for eternity—who have but a short time allowed us for preparation—who live in a deceiving and profligate world—are ourselves nevertheless far too much disposed to forego our true interests, to forget all that is worth remembering.

And this it is which makes our condition so truly dangerous; that we are so apt to be our own enemies, so apt to shut our eyes to our real circumstances, and to lay our consciences to sleep with false and flattering representations.

Thus then we are circumstanced; with eternity before us, depending on this short life, in a world of sin and corruption, and we ourselves so ready to yield to it.

This, I say, is our condition; and Almighty God sees that it is so.

He, who is all holiness and perfection, sees in what a world of sin and corruption we are; how apt we are to indulge our evil dispositions, how forgetful of him and his righteous will.

He likewise fully knows and sees what must be the dreadful consequences hereafter of unrepented sin here.

Moreover, this same most wise and holy God, is also all-powerful; as he fully knows what a mass of evil there is in the present world, and what this must lead to in the world to come, so he is fully able to employ all such means as to his wisdom shall seem fit, for averting or putting a check to it.

And as he is a God of infinite loving-kindness and tender mercy, who "would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" it is certain that he not only *can*, but that he *will*, and *does* employ

all the best means for bringing mankind to a true knowledge of their own condition, or the danger they are in, and of the way to escape it.

Considering then what *we* are, frail and helpless, weighed down with sin and weakness; considering also what *God* is, all-perfect in wisdom, holiness, and goodness, we may well expect that he will afford all possible aid to those who sincerely desire it.

We may expect, that to those who sincerely wish to know their duty and the way to heaven, means will be provided for imparting this knowledge.

We may expect that to those who wish to do their duty, and to please God in all things, such assistance will be afforded as shall render their labors not vain and fruitless.

We may also expect, not indeed that men's wills should be overruled (for perhaps no man *can* be forced to be good against his will), but, we may expect that some strong reasons and inducements should be offered to men's minds (if they choose to consider them); inducements, I say, to look forward to that eternity for which we are born, and, in expectation of the judgment to come, to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

But particularly we might expect, that our merciful God would provide us remembrancers; that is, persons duly authorized and appointed by him, to assist in keeping up in the world, a practical recollection of those vast momentous truths, confirmed or revealed to us in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For if this gospel is indeed true, and the work of man's salvation is indeed a matter of such difficulty and importance as it is there represented, and if also subjects of this sort, death, judgment, and eternity, occupy very little of most people's thoughts—very little in comparison of this world's business, then it seems plain that we need to have constant warning given us of our real condition.

But they who give this warning must have authority from God for the office they undertake, otherwise they

cannot claim to be attended to ; and, beside that, they have reason to fear that they are presumptuously intruding into an office to which they have no right. But, however, that people should act with thoughtlessness, ignorance, or presumptuousness, in this as in other matters, is indeed much to be lamented, but not at all to be wondered at. This does not prove but that it should be still highly reasonable, and a thing to be expected by us, that Almighty God should keep up in the church a known succession of men, ordained by an outward form, to be his "remembrancers" with a thoughtless and evil world, and by their office only (without regard to their character), to bear witness to the truth and awful importance of the Christian revelation.

And as this might have been expected beforehand, so we find it in fact to be the case. We find as well from what we read or hear of old times, as from what we see at this day, that ever since the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, or certainly from within a *very* short time after it, there have been in the church, orders of men, whose peculiar business it is to minister between God and man in the great dispensation of the gospel.

But in this ministry all are not equal ; there being different ranks and degrees, according to the different duties required.

Considering, however, that all are appointed to labor for our salvation, to keep alive in a careless world some due sense of the importance of religion ; and to warn men with authority of the necessity of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ : " therefore to all, but especially to bishops and priests, may be truly applied that description which St. Paul gives in the text, "Ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

From this we learn how to form a true estimate of such an institution as that of the Christian priesthood.

"Let a man account of us (says St. Paul), not as wise or foolish, good or bad, not, in short, according to our personal character or conduct, but only according to

our office and ministry; as "ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

We are in a dangerous world, on our trial for eternity, and whatever helps God is graciously pleased to send us, we should thankfully receive.

If an order of men is duly appointed to minister to us in holy things, and in this order are found many unworthy persons, this does not disannul the value of their office.

A bad clergyman is as much a minister of Christ as the best. Judas Iscariot was an apostle as much as St. John. We are not therefore to look to the person, but to the office.

And the reason is very plain; for we have enough to do to mind our own conduct, and to keep ourselves, if possible, in the right way. We are no judges of other men's hearts; "to their own master they must stand or fall."

If God sends us a good message by the hands of a bad man, are we therefore to reject the message?

Or if another man, of good character, calls himself a messenger or minister of God, when he has never been duly ordained to such offices, are we therefore to acknowledge him as such?

"No man taketh this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."

However, without entering into any of the bitterness of dispute or controversy upon the subject, it must be matter of consolation to every serious and humble Christian, that we have such a proof of God's watchful care over us, as the continued succession of regularly ordained ministers—bishops, priests, and deacons, from the apostles' times down to our own.

This must be a consolation to every serious and humble person, as showing so plainly the truth and reality of our holy religion, as also the personal regard which our heavenly Father feels for us all.

For every bishop or other minister is to be considered as Christ's special messenger and ambassador to all who are under his care.

Or in St. Paul's words, he is to be accounted as the "minister of Christ," to all who follow Christ; as the "steward of the mysteries of God," to all who sincerely desire to be partakers in those mysteries; to all whose only wish and object it is, "so to pass through things temporal, that they finally lose not the things eternal."

Christian brethren! the subject to which I have now called your attention, is one of real and serious importance; of far more importance, certainly, than the generality of Christians are used to suppose.

It becomes therefore every person, who sincerely wishes to go right, in this, as in other matters of practice, to be very cautious how he rests satisfied with common and prevailing notions; to inquire, observe, and examine with all humility, first, what the truth is, and then what his own conduct should be, according to the truth; and more than all, to be earnest and constant in his prayers at the throne of grace, that himself, and all others who call themselves Christians, "may hold the faith, in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life."

END OF VOL. I.













